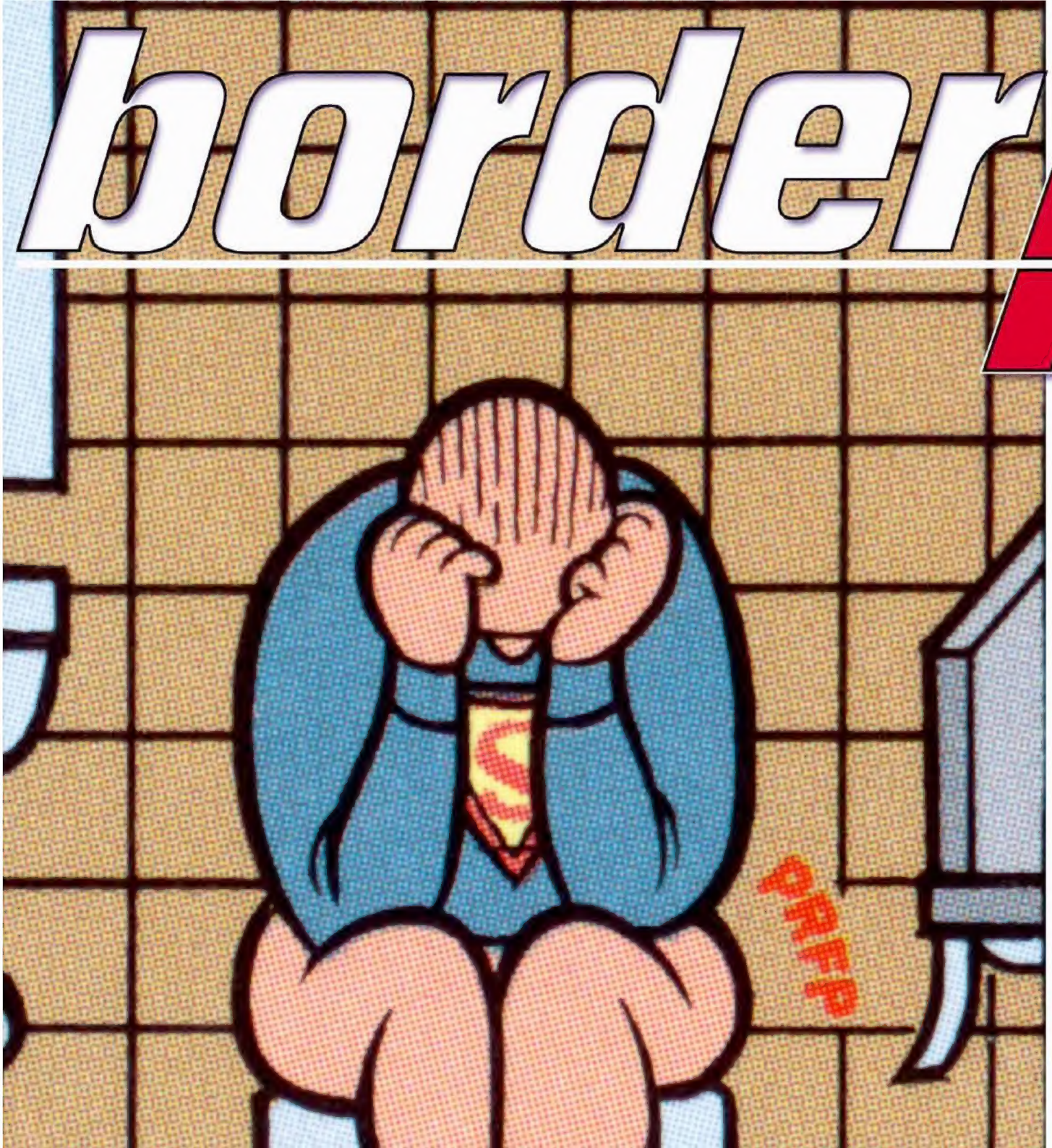
borderline

THE Comics Magazine

January #6



In this issue:

Interviews with:

Steve Gerber
Larry Young
& Martin Eden

Features on:

Chris Ware
Dan DeCarlo
Yves Chaland
Peter Ferguson
Gerry Alanguilan
Lew Stringer
Turnhout
Dudley Watkins
AIT/PlanetLar

Columns · Reviews
News · Views
Small Press

To make your enjoyment of Borderline an even easier experience, follow the simple point and click instructions: All contents have an internal link, allowing you to click on them and be taken automatically to that page. The Globe symbol at the bottom right of each page will take you back to the contents page.

There are also hyperlinks throughout Borderline enabling you to link directly with stories, websites and points of interest on the internet.

BL This symbol means something has finished!

IN THIS ISSUE...

Industry Standard – Phil Hall's monthly look at what's happening in the industry takes a hold as his thoughts turn to a new year for Borderline. 3

The Clear Line - Brad! Brooks looks at the career of Yves Chaland... 14

artbomb.net - Warren Ellis expands his internet presence even further with a new site dedicated to promoting the artform... 20

World Comics - Paul Gravett returns with a look at a new manga exhibition. 21

The Other Interview! Larry Young and Mimi Rosenheim - Adrian Brown drops in on the incredibly trendy publishers of **Astronauts in Trouble.** 23

Issues - Carol Close says bollocks to the best of the year, what about the turkeys? 26

The Blank Page - Chev takes a closer look at Frank Miller's return to DC and follow up to Dark Knight Returns. 27

Learning Curves - Sarah looks at *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* spinoff comics, currently the focus of attention by some speculators. 28

What Is Manga - Kevin Hill's affectionate look at **Peach Girl.** 29

Man on a Mission - Martin Shipp on "The War Against Terrorism"'s worst victim... 30

Comics Milestones – Mike Kidson looks at the legendary Dudley Watkins... 31

Tales of Turnhout - Mike Kidson returns from Belgium with a suitcase full of Euro comics, tales to tell and not a superhero in sight... 40

The other Other Interview! Martin Eden - Never heard of him? Well, you will have now! Eden's **O Men** has been hailed as the best small press superhero comic *ever*. Kelvin Green initiates what all would be comics creators dream of... 44

The Verdict - **Borderline**'s jury of reviewers - attempting to cover everything from pamphlets to graphic novels to Internet sites. Have they reached the right Verdict? Do you agree with the Borderline Psychotics? Plus all sorts of other things! 48

RaineyWorld: Comics 2040 - DC's answer to Ultimate Fat Marvel. **Mouse Elephant** in super-black-&-white-&-yellow-o-vision... 55

Young Guns - Ever heard of Gerry Alanguilan? Well, you will have now! Readers of **Uncanny X-Men** will be familiar with his inking some guy called Yu. Others will know him for his self-published work. Either way, he's a star of the future... 58

Drawing Board - A sneak peek inside the portfolio of Lew Stringer - From *Oink* to *Combat Colin*, the spotlight falls on one of the UK's top humour artists... 60

World of Heros - Chris and Rebecca have another look at a load of made up hilarity... we're expecting the lawsuit from Chris Claremont any day now! 63

Hold the Back Page - NOT your letters! 64

Miffy - Terry Wiley and Ady Kermode's dippy brunette gets all existential! 64

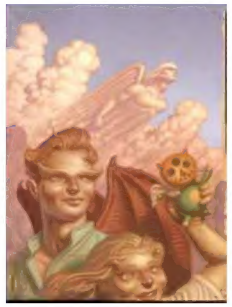
BORDER LINES

POINT AND CLICK CONTENTS

SPOTLIGHTS

Chris Ware - A six-page feature on the winner of the *Guardian* First Book Award, only the second major prize awarded to a comicbook. 5

Dan DeCarlo - believed by many to be one of the most influential and important US comicbook creators of all time – the Betty and Veronica man passes away at 82...13



Even Weirder X-Books - Peter Ferguson's first comics work has been on high profile X-books, here's a sneak peak at why his work is hot..... 18

The Big Interview! Steve Gerber - Martin Shipp talks to the man who created the "other" duck. Gerber talks about ducks, music, films, some comics and his current **Howard the Duck** series..... 33

borderline
THE COMICS MAGAZINE

Published by mediahall.
Each issue is available to download FREE from the following Websites:
http://borderline.mediahall.co.uk, www.bugpowder.com, www.coolbeansworld.com, www.silverbulletcomicbooks.com and many more, just check our affiliates webpage!

Letters to: ..... *borderline@borderline.mediahall.co.uk*
Phil Hall ..... editor (*editorial@borderline.mediahall.co.uk*)
Martin Shipp & Mike Kidson ..... deputy editors (*martin.shipp@borderline.mediahall.co.uk*) ..... *features* (*mike.kidson@borderline.mediahall.co.uk*) .. *production*
Andy Winter ..... reviews (*reviews@borderline.mediahall.co.uk*)
Mike Sivier ..... news (*news@borderline.mediahall.co.uk*) ..... *mainstream*
Dan Black ..... press and publicity (*publicity@borderline.mediahall.co.uk*)
John Parkinson ..... Webmaster (*john.parkinson@borderline.mediahall.co.uk*)
Pete Ashton & Jay Eales ..... associate editors
Do you read this? Thanks to Paul Annis (come back soon!), Chris Ware, Eric Reynolds, Lew Stringer, and Mark Powers. Cover design by the lovely Jim Campbell, picture from **Acme Novelty Library** by Chris Ware – Jimmy Corrigan – in the dumps or taking one?

Editorial address:
Borderline, 45 Fullingdale Road, The Headlands, Northampton, NN3 2PZ England

Contributions, advertising and other queries call 01604 513867 or e-mail *phil.hall@borderline.mediahall.co.uk*

This issue is respectfully dedicated to the memory of Dan DeCarlo.

Borderline on the web
http://groups.yahoo.com/group/borderline_magazine
http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Borderline-announce
http://forums.delphi.com/BorderlineTCM/start

*Unless otherwise stated the copyright of all material that is published in this PDF product lies with the individual authors or their employers. No part of this publication should therefore be reproduced, or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including printing or photocopying, or by any information storage or retrieval system, without permission **in writing** from the copyright holder(s) and the editor. Complete copies of this file may be reproduced and freely distributed as long as no profit is made. This document may be printed out for your personal, home use.*

INDUSTRY STANDARD

Phil Hall is ringing in the changes...

BORDERLINE was born out of frustration and restraint. My time at **Comics International** was hindered by the near-sightedness of the publisher – a person who is redefining the definition of the word "anachronism" on a monthly basis. Too often the integrity of that magazine was compromised by a lack of flair and pioneer spirit – for some it's easier to just take the money and run, rather than actually try to improve the ailing parts of the industry. I could understand this philosophy if the end product was cutting-edge or earning shed loads of money and respect; however the only thing cutting-edge about it now is its bad reputation.

Change isn't a word that features in the vocabulary of some magazines. But there has never been a truer statement than 'change or die' as far as magazines are concerned – so with this issue, our sixth proper one, I've decided to take a long hard look at what we've got and how we're delivering it.

NO NEWS IS GOOD NEWS

What's the point of trying to compete with the likes of Michael Doran, Matt Brady or Beau Yarborough? If **Borderline** were a daily magazine, then we'd be taking these guys to the wire. However, we're not in this business to be rivals of anyone, we're here to complement the industry and I think we've done a pretty good job of it so far.

That's why **Borderline** is going to be dropping its conventional news coverage from this issue onwards. We've had the best feedback on our news coverage for pieces like the Al Davison or Steve Lightle mini-interviews; the **Lucky Luke** coverage in #1 and the **Eureka** feature in the same issue. It appears that the most vocal of our readers want to see "The Sunday Supplement" approach rather than read a load of sound bites and brief publisher hyperbole.

Subsequently this means something of a reshuffle in editorial. Mike Sivier will remain as general news editor, while Jay Eales is moving onto more exciting projects. Hopefully the readers won't object too much to our new approach to the news; we've tried to do things differently with it, to make it a bit more unique, but we're also big enough to put our hands up and say, "we're Internet delivered and monthly, we can't hope to compete with the daily news websites".

HOLD THAT BACK PAGE

We're getting between 30 and 50 emails a month complimenting us on what a fine job we do, etc. I'm beginning to feel a little embarrassed about running a stream of letters and e-mails that just continue to blow our own trumpet.

For the last three issues, we've struggled desperately to fit everything in, having, in the end, to drop things for the sake of the size of the magazine. I've struggled to find letters to include that are critical and invite an informative response. Consequently, *Hold the Back Page* has become an extended editorial column, and therefore an extension of the editor's ego. And you're not downloading this magazine to hear the thoughts of Chairman Hall (and even if you are, you're in the smallest of minorities), you're downloading it for the diversity and quality of the product.

So, we're kicking the letters page into touch and hopefully using that last page for something a little more interesting. Keep those letters coming, though - we value your feedback. Although you won't see them in print, you may well receive a personal response!

THE REAL COST OF CHRISTMAS

As many of you are well aware, we do this for nothing. There is no

THE UNSEEN BORDERLINE COVERS

Excuse our self-indulgence, but we thought you might like to see some of the covers that were either rejected or had to be scrapped because of US comic publishers and their rather silly embargoes. NB: What is reflected in the eyes of Spider-Man in the rejected #3 cover?

Click on Globe returns to contents

fat cheque at the end of the month that makes all the hard work and commitment worthwhile. What little money we make from the small amount of advertising goes towards the costs of the magazine (including the cost of running the website; we still haven't made enough money to cover any of our editorial costs).

That is why at some point during this month there will be a voluntary donations button placed on the site. We don't want to have to charge the reader for this magazine. We'd hoped that major companies like DC, Dark Horse, Image and even Marvel might have advertised with us - after all, we are doing this *for* the industry, and therefore *for* them.

But Marvel has no budget to spend outside of **Wizard**, DC isn't quite on the same planet as the rest of the world and we didn't even get a courtesy "no thanks" from either of the other major comic companies. So, we're asking you lot to fork out a minimum of $1.00, on a purely voluntary basis. I don't expect many of you will do it, but if you like what you read and would like to continue to like what you read, then perhaps you'll consider getting that credit card out and losing a dollar or two.

NOW WITH ADDED 'COMPLETELY DIFFERENT'

We appreciate that the majority of our readers are based in the US and the UK (although that figure now represents only 70% of the total downloads, as opposed to 90% for the first couple of issues) and that superheroes what has brought many of you here. We're not giving up on superheroes, so don't think we're neglecting you. But, we are going to diversify even more. We're going to go to the furthest reaches of the planet for the comics and people in comics that may never be mentioned in other English language publications. You may never be interested in these things, but if you want to broaden your horizons and educate yourself further, you'll get the chance with **Borderline**!

So finally, the entire team wishes you, our loyal readers, a very happy, peaceful and prosperous New Year!

BORDERLINE
THE COMICS MAGAZINE
Tomb Raiding: Adam Hughes does Lara Croft!
Alan Moore: The Interview
Top magazine bites the dust
Small Press Independents News, views and reviews!
THE MAGAZINE THAT ISN'T SCARED TO USE THE C-WORD

These two covers are real rareties: The one on the left is the original prototype cover for the first issue. This was designed before we opted for the landscape format. The one below was the cover to #4 up till the day before release, but Marvel having promised the image to another magazine asked us to use another image, so we went for another company altogether!

Click on Globe returns to contents

THE SMARTEST CREATOR IN THE WORLD?

Chris Ware wins The Guardian's First Book Award with the ground-breaking story of Jimmy Corrigan

JIMMY Corrigan, the Smartest Kid on Earth is the second US winner in the last three years of *The Guardian* First Book Award. The book's author, Chris Ware, was given the £10,000 prize, recently recognised as an important literary award, at a ceremony in London on December 6, 2001. The graphic novel (actually a collection of strips from Ware's **Acme Novelty Library** series for Fantagraphics) is the first major comicbook award since Art Spiegelman won the Pulitzer Prize in 1992 for **Maus**.

Jimmy Corrigan won the award by a single vote, in what was regarded by the newspaper as a close run thing. The final shortlist for the award included Miranda Carter's biography of the Soviet spy and art expert Anthony Blunt and Glen David Gold's novel **Carter Beats the Devil**, which told the story of the meeting between Warren Harding, the so-called "worst ever US president" and the illusionist Carter the Great. Claire Armitstead, the Guardian literary editor said, "**Jimmy Corrigan** is a fantastic winner, because it so clearly shows what the Guardian award is about." She continued, "Ware has produced a book as beautiful as any published this year, but also one which challenges us to think again about what literature is and where it is going."

CHRIS WARE - A LIFE TO DATE

1967, Born; Omaha, Nebraska
Studied English and Art at University of Texas with the idea of drawing comics "in the grand tradition of **Heavy Metal**"
1987-1991: Draws strip for *Daily Texan* newspaper's weekly arts section
Appears in two issues of *Raw* in 1990 and 1991
1992 to date: draws strip in Chicago's local alternative paper *New City*
1993 to date: Fantagraphics collects the strips from *Daily Texan* and *New City* as **The ACME Novelty Library**
1993: Ware starts work on *Jimmy Corrigan*, "planned purely as an improvisatory exercise... to hopefully provide a semi-autobiographical setting in which I could work out some of the more embarrassing problems of confidence and emotional truthfulness I was experiencing." It is serialised in *New City* and takes him five years to complete
1995: Fantagraphics starts collecting **Jimmy Corrigan** with **ACME #5**
1998: Upon nearing completion of the work, Ware's father telephones him out of the blue after 30 years absence
2000: Fantagraphics publishes final installment of *Jimmy Corrigan* and 1st edition of the award winning collection. Pantheon (Random House US) publish book trade edition
2001: Jonathan Cape publish UK book trade edition on June 14
August 24, 2001: **Jimmy Corrigan** named on longlist for *Guardian* New Book award. Reaches shortlist on November 7 and wins by one vote on December 7. Sells out across the UK in the run up to Xmas

Click on Globe returns to contents

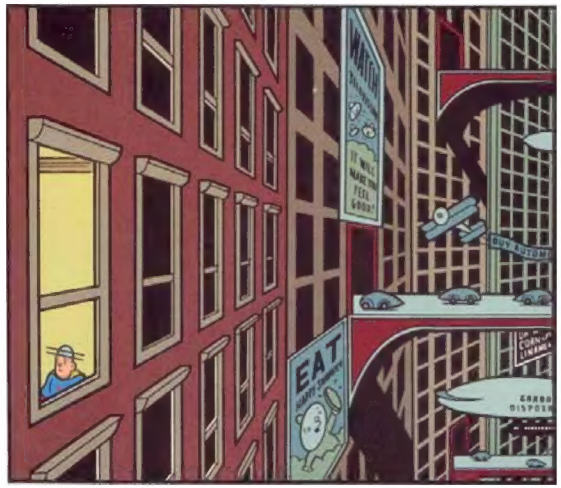
ACME NOVELTY LIBRARY – HUMOUR IN A *REALLY* JUGULAR VEIN

THE long, prize-winning *Jimmy Corrigan* story may have been the main event in **Acme Novelty Library** for the past several years, but the latest issue of the title serves as a salutary reminder that **ANL** is, perhaps above all, one of the funniest comics currently being published in English. To be sure, the humour is generally cruel, abrasive and seemingly aimed to evoke a reaction somewhere between a laugh and a wince - but humour it undoubtedly is.

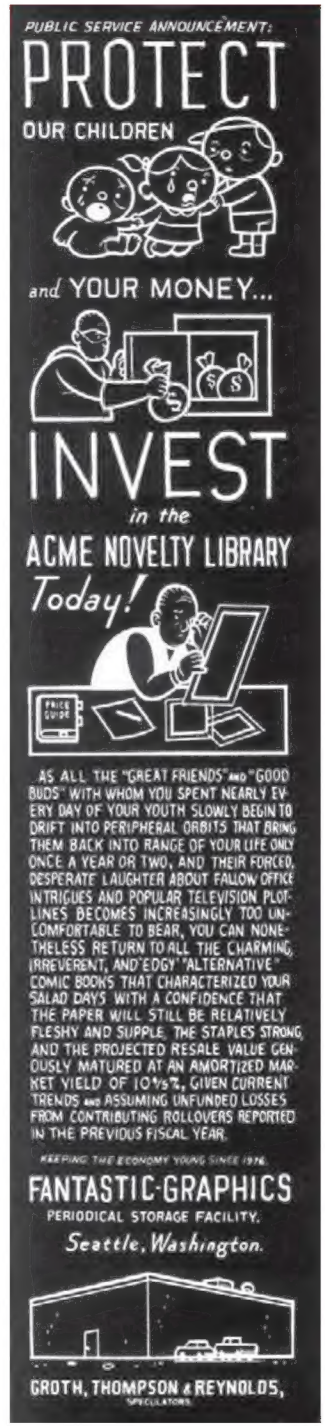
Issue 17 pulls back from the long form narrative of the Corrigan story to focus on matters dear to the hearts of many comics fans, consumption and collection – and the first joke in this, the second Collected Book of Jokes, is its size. See if you can store this 46 x 27 cm sucker alongside your carefully bagged and graded comicbooks, pal… but buy it quickly, because the cover instructs the retailer to "Display until bent, scratched, stained, thumbed, torn, soiled or bankrupt". Opening the comic, the already perturbed collector will find no less than a long, detailed screed of prose analysing various different types of collector - all of whom, it transpires, share just one common trait, an interest in pornographic videotapes. What can do but laugh loudly or turn away in disgust? Such is the knife-edge nature of Ware's notion of a joke.

About a quarter of the short strips which make up the rest of the issue dramatize that prose fusillade. *Rusty Brown* mercilessly charts the life of a stereotypical "collector" – paunchy, obsessed, unable to relate to women as anything other than distant objects of an unfulfilled lust, finally educed to a bitter, morose middle-aged existence of mumbling to himself, living amid mounds of garbage and fantasising about his best friend's little daughter. Ware probes a vein of humour akin to that of John Cleese's *Fawlty Towers* here – the reader laughs at his hopelessly obsessive antics while cringing with embarrassment, perhaps even recognition…

But this is slight stuff by Ware's standards, perhaps a diversion after the years of working on the long, intense *Corrigan* serial. All of this Collected Book of Jokes is light in tone – it's a book of jokes, after all! – by comparison with that; but it also marks a return to preoccupations, both stylistic and thematic, which were hardly relevant to Jimmy Corrigan's tale. The other main set of strips besides *Rusty Brown* is *Tales of Tomorrow*, a set of anecdotes about a sad, unspeaking schlub who lives in a futuristic world where he has no contact with other people and no apparent role other than to consume the quite literally mindless products which are showered upon him. Again, much humour is wrung from the nameless protagonist's pathetic life and activities, but Ware seems to be playing a deeper game than merely yoking it up. The city setting is the future paradise of a thousand science fiction pulps, all soaring art deco towers, walkways and air cars… a paradise exposed as a series of designs which are meaningless because they embody a virtually subhuman quality of life.



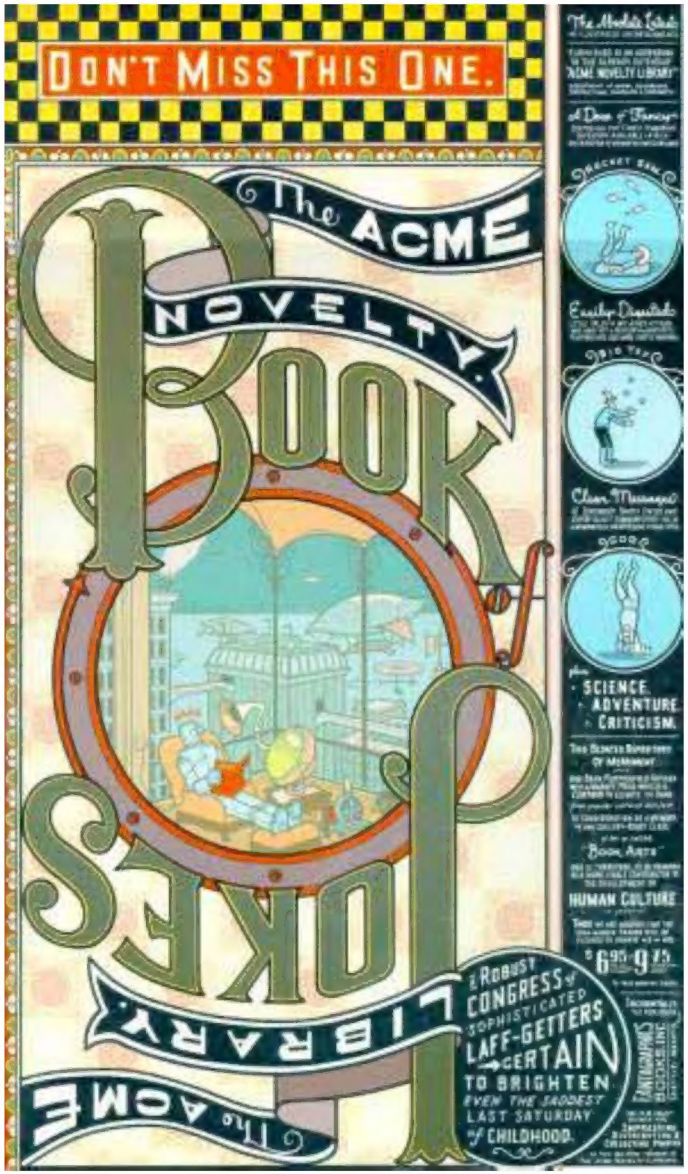
And here we approach the overall theme of **ACME Novelty Library**, although not of Corrigan. Throughout the series Ware appears to postulate a massive speculation – what if American comicbooks had sprung not from the cheap, cheerful and action-oriented pulps but from middlebrow magazines? The 1930s loom large in Ware's work, from Quimby The Mouse, whose animation cel style reminds us of Mickey but whose relationship with Sparky the Cat calls to mind that of Herriman's Krazy and Ignatz, to the pre-war magazine style, both editorial and typographical, of the various prose pieces. In a sense, he is creating the comicbooks anew, as something they could have been – brighter, deeper and, perhaps above all, respectable. Ironically, the post-modernist nature of that act is very much a badge of respectability today; perhaps Ware may yet construct a future for American comics from a reorganisation vision of their past. But perhaps not – for, after all, it is the more immediate and contemporary Corrigan serial which has won the plaudits and the awards… yet has still been sneered at by pundits from outside the world of comics. Let us not forget that *Tales of Tomorrow* postulates a future which contains no hope… *Mike Kidson*


PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT:
PROTECT
OUR CHILDREN
and YOUR MONEY...
INVEST
in the
ACME NOVELTY LIBRARY
Today!
AS ALL THE "GREAT FRIENDS" AND "GOOD BUDS" WITH WHOM YOU SPENT NEARLY EVERY DAY OF YOUR YOUTH SLOWLY BEGIN TO DRIFT INTO PERIPHERAL ORBITS THAT BRING THEM BACK INTO RANGE OF YOUR LIFE ONLY ONCE A YEAR OR TWO, AND THEIR FORCED, DESPERATE LAUGHTER ABOUT FALLOW OFFICE INTRIGUES AND POPULAR TELEVISION PLOTLINES BECOMES INCREASINGLY TOO UNCOMFORTABLE TO BEAR, YOU CAN NONETHELESS RETURN TO ALL THE CHARMING, IRREVERENT, AND 'EDGY' "ALTERNATIVE" COMIC BOOKS THAT CHARACTERIZED YOUR SALAD DAYS WITH A CONFIDENCE THAT THE PAPER WILL STILL BE RELATIVELY FLESHY AND SUPPLE, THE STAPLES STRONG, AND THE PROJECTED RESALE VALUE GENUOUSLY MATURED AT AN AMORTIZED MARKET YIELD OF 10½%, GIVEN CURRENT TRENDS AND ASSUMING UNFUNDED LOSSES FROM CONTRIBUTING ROLLOVERS REPORTED IN THE PREVIOUS FISCAL YEAR.
KEEPING THE ECONOMY YOUNG SINCE 1976
FANTASTIC-GRAPHICS
PERIODICAL STORAGE FACILITY.
Seattle, Washington.
GROTH, THOMPSON & REYNOLDS,

Click on Globe returns to contents

A TRULY IMPORTANT AWARD FOR AN IGNORED MEDIUM

Hardly acknowledged inside its own industry, how will Jimmy Corrigan affect the future of US comics?



IS the comics industry embarrassed by the success of one of its own? This would appear to be the case if you looked at the amount of exposure Chris Ware's **Jimmy Corrigan, the Smartest Kid on Earth** has received from all but the most hi-brow of comics' journals.

It beggars belief that a comic book could win a major literary award and yet be ignored by the comics reading masses. Or maybe it's because the majority of comics readers in the Western world aren't really interested in the rest of the world acknowledging their hobby - after all, it's really about superheroines with huge breasts, and world domination by colourful and camp characters. Isn't it?

Comic fans sadly do nothing to improve the image of their hobby in the eyes of the "real world".

A well-respected BBC television arts show featured Chris Ware's **Jimmy Corrigan, the Smartest Kid on Earth**; one of the most positive things said about it was one reviewer's reluctance to read it because of its "garish colours". This is what one has to face when attempting to get a derided medium accepted by people who view the winner of the Turner Prize as a genius. One could write a huge thesis about why Jimmy Corrigan has more artistic integrity in its first page than a light going on and off in an empty room will ever have. However, talentless extroverts will always garner mainstream press coverage – it goes with their rather egocentric lifestyles.

Whether winning *The Guardian* First Book Award is actually worth anything on a global scale has yet to be determined. The sad truth is that countries like Belgium, France, Italy, Spain, Japan and Brazil will view this comic's triumph as nothing out of the ordinary - comics *are* the norm in these countries. The fact that it is receiving a mixture of bemused reaction and novelty value (Acme Novelty?) will probably have most of the rest of the world shaking its collective head at the snobbery of the US and UK. Even *The Guardian* had to concede that most people would greet their decision to award Ware the title with a mixture of disbelief and derision. The paper even beat people to the punch line by stating quite categorically that some people will view the decision as tokenism.

There has been little recognition of comics, since Ware's award, from the outside world, despite some of the major US comics publishers trying to recapture that "lightning in a bottle" that buzzed round the comics scene in the 1980s, most notably in the new Frank Miller **Dark Knight Strikes Back** series - the sequel to a comic that did much to promote the medium 15 years ago. DC Comics' much hyped series has, if anything, devalued the original **Dark Knight Returns** series, reducing its historical worth to that of an anachronism. What next, one wonders? A follow-up to **Watchmen**?

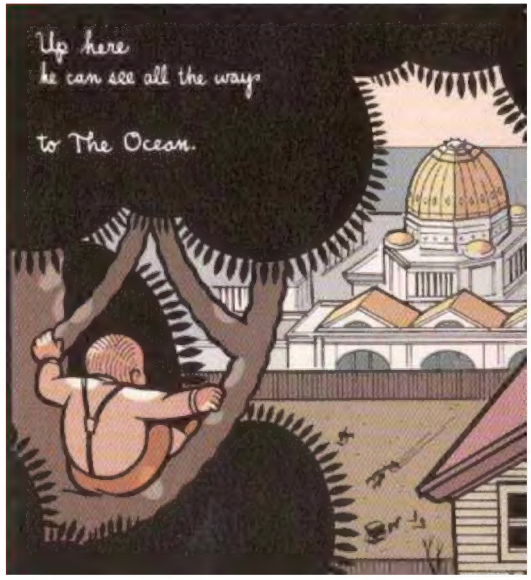
Click on Globe returns to contents

Even **Maus,** Art Spiegelman's seminal graphic novel about the holocaust, was arguably only a successful book because of its anthropomorphic slant. He took something horrific and told it in an almost cutesy way and therefore the mass public gave it a chance. Like superheroes done for a sophisticated audience, **Maus** was sophistication trumped up in accessibility through necessity. However, **Jimmy Corrigan** is neither **Maus** nor a revisionist DC series.

Jimmy Corrigan, the Smartest Kid on Earth has been successful in its content rather than its rule-breaking or revisionism.

It probably doesn't help the US and UK comics industry much when the recipient of a major literary prize admits, "I still have overwhelming doubt about my ability". If there's one thing that you could say about Chris Ware is that he's probably one of the most modest souls working in any form of entertainment. However, all too often the real world looks at comics and the people involved with comics and says "geek". Ware could probably do with having the chutzpah of a Tracey Emin or Damien Hirst.

Ware comes across as a self-effacing, conscientious and intelligent man, when he should probably come across more like a Rob Liefeld or a Todd McFarlane. But he didn't grow up in a California or a New York state; his roots are in Omaha, Nebraska, the cultural and geographical middle of America… a place where Ware says, "I felt frighteningly at home." He also grew up with a stack of pre-war comicbooks found in his grandmother's basement, obviously the catalyst for **Acme Novelty Library** and the author's apparent own revisionist obsession of rewriting the birth of modern comic books. As Art Spiegelman commented, "It's uncanny that someone so young would have such an apparent recollection of the history of comics and the talent to expand upon it."

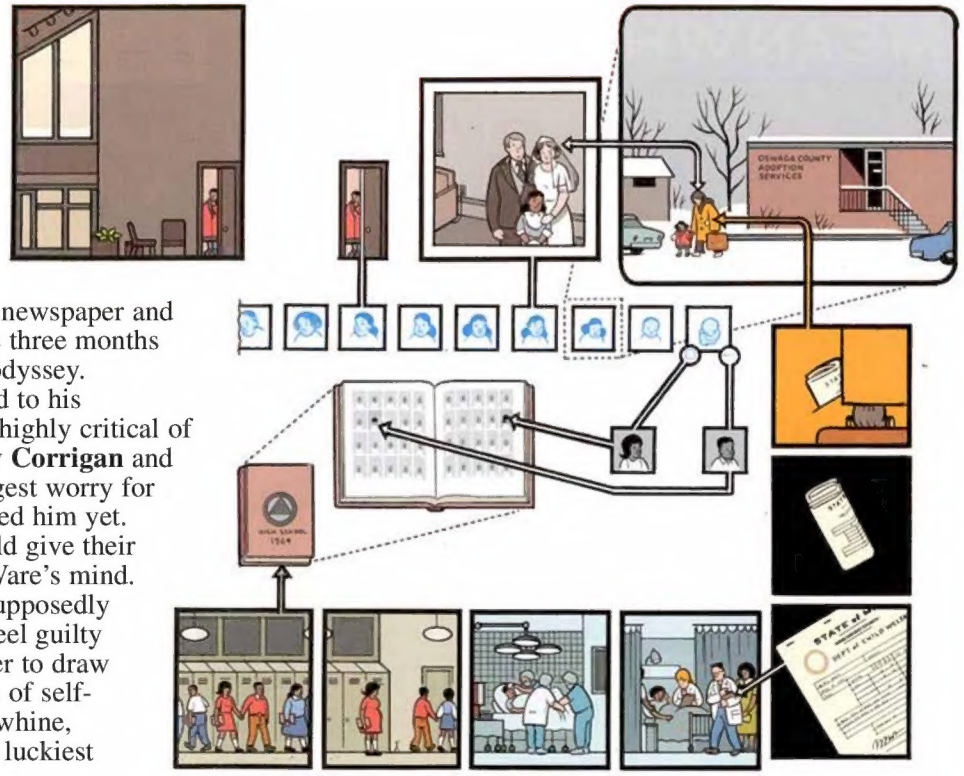


His journey into comics mirrors many of the readers' lives, "I realised that I wasn't going to develop into any sort of athletic type. I made up for it in the fantasy world. Fairly typical sort of story, I guess." Despite being discouraged from pursuing a career in comics while at art school, he started writing *Jimmy Corrigan.* The drive came from a deep-rooted sense of abandonment – Ware grew up with his mother and grandparents, his father left when he was a baby – and a poignant scene in the graphic novel is the first meeting between Jimmy and his father. Eventually the comic strip was picked up by a Chicago newspaper and what Ware thought would be three months work turned into a six year odyssey.

His modesty comes second to his unyielding self-doubt. He is highly critical of the first 100 pages of **Jimmy Corrigan** and calls them "a mess"; the biggest worry for him is that no one has rumbled him yet. Having a job that many would give their right arm for also plays on Ware's mind. "I'm sitting at home doing supposedly whatever I want and then I feel guilty about that and then it's harder to draw because of this endless cycle of self-indulgence. I don't mean to whine, though. I feel like one of the luckiest people around."

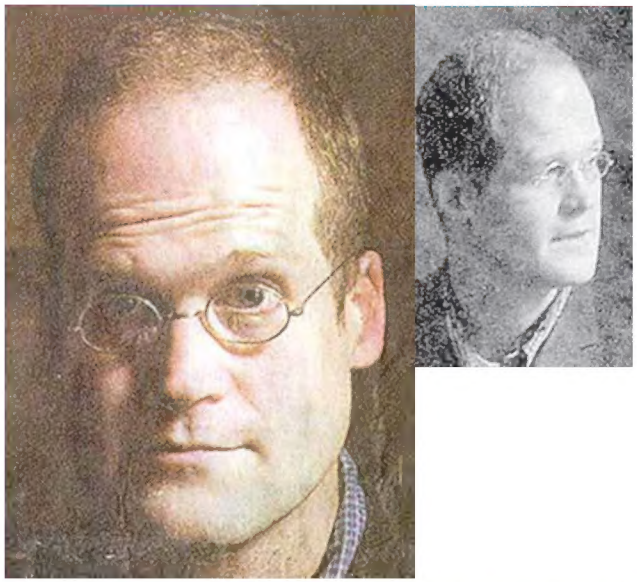
Ware gives off all the wrong signals, especially coming from such a parochial and hyperbole-driven, self-believing country. But it is refreshing to observe an American who remains so profoundly unimpressed with himself. This is perhaps why the US comics press has basically ignored this international success.

Hopefully the British will take a leaf out of the Europeans' book and will welcome the modest Ware and his contemporaries in the comics industry. In a country where certain publications, such as **Viz** and **Furry Freak Brothers** comics, are perennial favourites and are never treated with the slightest derision, perhaps it can be accepted that there is more to *other* comics than spandex, unfeasibly distorted bodies and adolescent power fantasies.



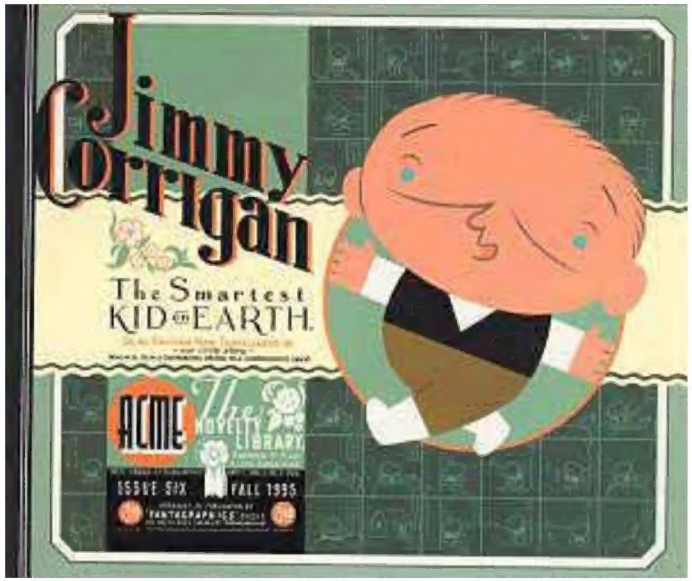
Click on Globe returns to contents

WHO GOES WARE



"Chris Ware is interviewed out!" said Fantagraphics' Eric Reynolds, "But let me see what I can do." We didn't expect to hear back. Ware had just been on a whirlwind trip to the UK to receive his Guardian First Book Award, was behind on deadlines for his weekly strip at www.newcity.com, had family visiting for Christmas and was notorious for leaving huge backlogs of emails.

But true to his word Eric did the liaising and Chris came through with what is his only comic magazine interview since winning the award. Phil Hall was given just five questions to ask so he and long-time fan Pete Ashton tried to ask the most pertinent questions they could think of...



Borderline: Given that a) ***Jimmy Corrigan*** *was originally serialised in the* New City *newspaper and then in the* ***ACME*** *comic books over seven years, and b) you allowed the comic to evolve, for want of a better word, page by page, how do you intend to approach your next project and can you tell us what that project is?*

Chris Ware: It's a sort of love story called *Rusty Brown*, set mostly in 1970s Nebraska, involving a number of characters. I wish I could say I've crafted a new, surgical, foolproof working method, but I'm probably still making all the same mistakes I did before. If anything, this one is even more of a hazy dreamscape, though I do have a fairly specific outline; I make notes as to major events, impulses, and ideas - about 10% of which actually make it into the story. Much of what appears, though, is suggested by the turns of the narrative on a weekly basis. I shouldn't be admitting this, I guess. My way of making comics is sort of halfway between real writing and prison art, I'd guess.

BL: How did being published by Pantheon and Jonathan Cape affect you? Do you feel as if you're working in a different field now? Or is it the same?

CW: I suppose it's a bit unnerving to realize that there are people whom I'll never meet who have actually read my stuff now, since the "comics world" is pretty insular, and one seems to come across familiar faces quite a bit. As to self-confidence, I don't really feel any different; recent books by other cartoonists published this year have humbled and astounded me, as they always do. It really is a good time for comics now; one might almost optimistically call it a "golden age".

Click on Globe returns to contents

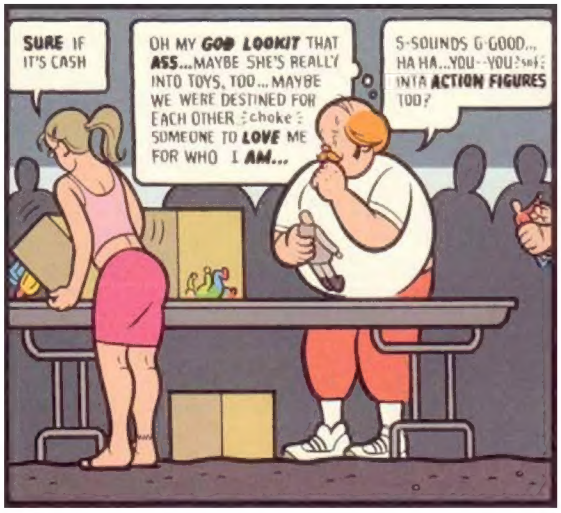
BL: The design of the book is impressive to say the least. One commentator has said that ***Jimmy Corrigan*** *(paraphrase) "could fulfil the destiny of the graphic novel and be bought by thousands of people who will never actually read it but instead leave it on their coffee tables". Any comments?*

CW: I'd hope not, of course. That would be like a soundtrack album for a film being more highly regarded than the film itself. Comics are meant to be read, and, in my case at least, to not insult the reader by being slapdash or unclear. That's about the best I can hope for. My design is all in the service of a story, told more or less "musically" through pictures, and to hopefully hint at a genuine feeling of life.

BL: How do you feel you fit into the comics community? Your work makes reference to Superman, fanboys, etc. Could you be described as a typical comics fan? Do you feel it's important that a book which follows the lineage of comics from the last century, from ***Gasoline Alley*** *and* ***Krazy Kat*** *to* ***Raw****, has won a mainstream prize? As opposed to, say, books by Ben Katchor or Posy Simmonds?*

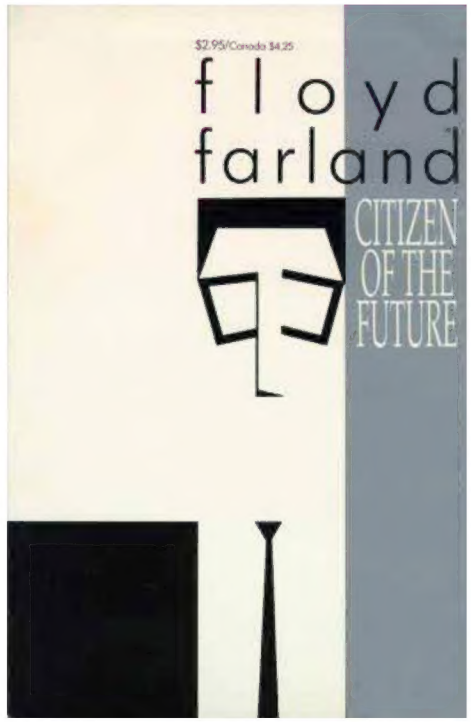
CW: I'm quite grateful and amazed to be considered as a potential peer to Zadie Smith by receiving the *Guardian* award, even though I know such a comparison isn't at all accurate; she's an amazing writer, and I'm just sort of a lucky cartoonist. I guess I don't really think about "lineage" much, either, though at the same time I'm very proud to be a cartoonist, and I revere the work of those you mention as much or more than most artists or writers someone else might summon up.

I'd love to imagine, however, that I'd made Charles Schulz proud of me. Cartooning is an incredibly hard thing to do. It's isolating, laborious, self-questioning work - drawn glacially slowly yet read blindingly fast. Who would want to gaze into a table for hours, days, years, trying to create people while their friends and relatives went on about their lives and enjoyed each others' company? But I think that the end result - a potentially all-encompassing visual, emotional experience, entirely from the hand of one artist - is hopefully at least a little bit worth it.


SURE IF IT'S CASH
OH MY GOD LOOKIT THAT ASS...MAYBE SHE'S REALLY INTO TOYS, TOO... MAYBE WE WERE DESTINED FOR EACH OTHER :choke: SOMEONE TO LOVE ME FOR WHO I AM...
S-SOUNDS G-GOOD... HA HA...YOU--YOU? :sob: INTA ACTION FIGURES TOO?

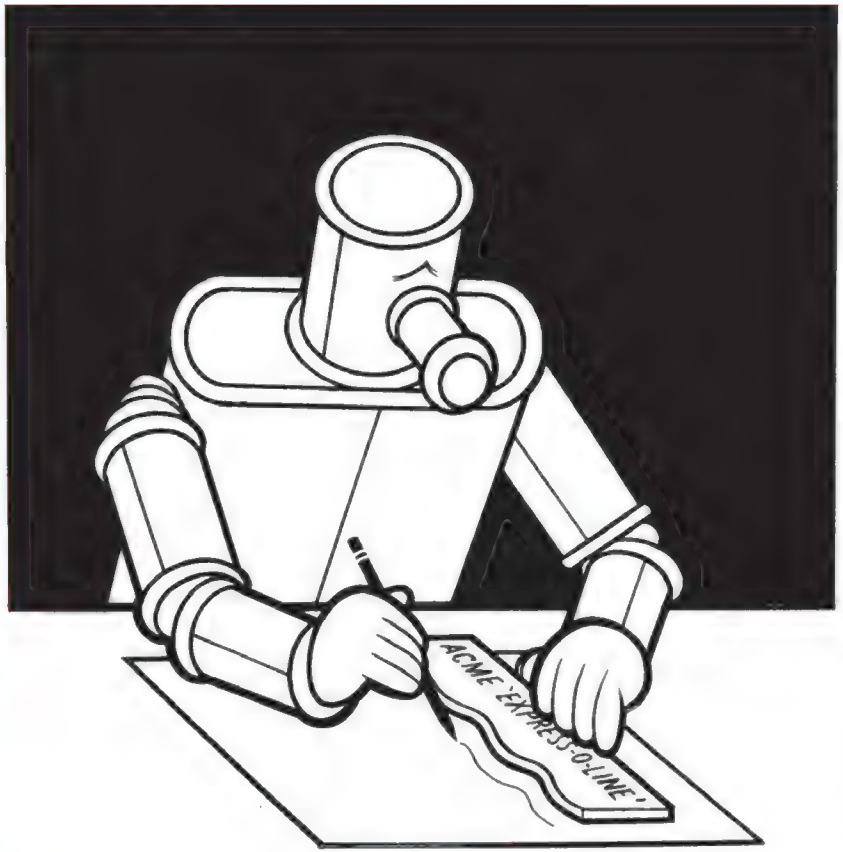
BL: Do you feel you are perceived as a literary oddity, or as a serious contributor to the world of books? If the former, does this bother you?

CW: I have no idea what to think. Of course, one always wants to make something that people don't hate, and how it is received or classified is entirely out of the artist or writer's hands. I would be very grateful, however, if one day I happened to see intelligent comics not in the children's section or in a "graphic novels" section (where **The Story of O** and **Lady Chatterley's Lover** should rightly be shelved) but somewhere a little more respectable. Who knows, though? Just recently I was pained to discover that a group of respected critics on British television, purporting to review my book following the *Guardian* award, were less embarrassed to admit not having read it (before essentially dismissing it) than to admit having read it. That experience was rather humbling, needless to say.



A selection of Ware art including, above, his first comic (?) ***Floyd Farland, Citizen of the Future*** *- Fall 1987, Eclipse Books, B&W, 50 pages*

Click on Globe returns to contents



CHRIS WARE: HIS ART

CHRIS WARE seemed to burst onto the comics scene in 1993 when Fantagraphics published the first issue of **The ACME Novelty Library**. People were unsure what to make of this new auteur who seemed to simultaneously throw the rule book out of the window whilst producing some of the most complicated and, importantly, readable, comics seen for a long while. The first four issues defy simple description. Issue one is a simple comic book containing the early *Jimmy Corrigan* strips, but while it looks normal a closer reading reveals it to be rather different from the usual fare, in content as much as style. The second issue is 11 by 14 inches and the only illustrations on its huge cover are hundreds of small mice down one side. This is *Quimby the Mouse*. I cannot describe him in this small space, except to say that his love/hate object is a disembodied cat's head called Sparky. Inside we find numerous full page strips with an almost excessive number of black and white panels, but not quite. This is repeated in issue #4, but in between we shrink to minicomic format with #3, telling the story of a sad potato-shaped man who keeps losing his eyes and catching fire.

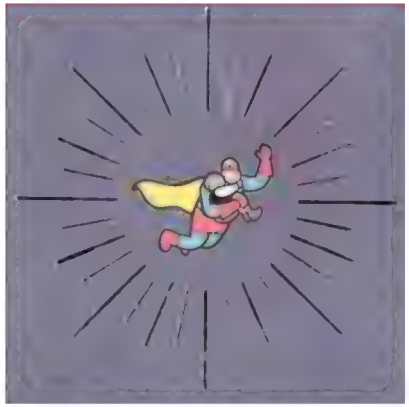
And then, after playing riffs off every conceivable way of "doing comics", the award winning *Jimmy Corrigan* story begins, running through eight landscape A5 booklets. (I won't mention issue #7, the 18 inch tall Book of Jokes - that's for you to discover for yourselves).

Without question, Chris Ware's comics are much more than eye-candy, as *Jimmy Corrigan* proves to anyone who's read it in one sitting. He brings to his work a force seldom seen in the art form. It is not angry, not pretentious, but powerful enough to render you speechless. Ware uses his deep understanding of how comics work to drive this home; here are a few of his tricks.

You'll notice, when reading *Jimmy Corrigan*, that the only faces shown are those of Jimmy, his Dad, his grandfather and his sister. Everyone else is obscured or off panel as they relate to the main leads. At its most basic, this ensures that the reader empathizes with the main character in the story and sees the story from their point of view. More subtly, by hearing the supporting cast's voices but not seeing their faces, you are forced to read more into what they are saying. As Ware says, "simply showing every character's emotional reaction instantly seems to limit the potential for any subtlety of feeling. Adults lie with their faces. The comic strip language is not sophisticated enough to deal with that fact."

On the same level, look at Jimmy's eyes. The small round dots echo Charlie Brown, Tintin or Skeezix (from **Gasoline Alley**) and create a sense of empathy which is not present in the drawing of a "real" eye. By simplifying how his characters appear, they become more like us. Were they more richly detailed they would be distinctively someone else. This is a common trick in comics, though sadly forgotten by those who like their art "realistic". Think about it. Bruce Wayne is Bruce Wayne but anyone can be Batman with his white eyeslits, hence the appeal.

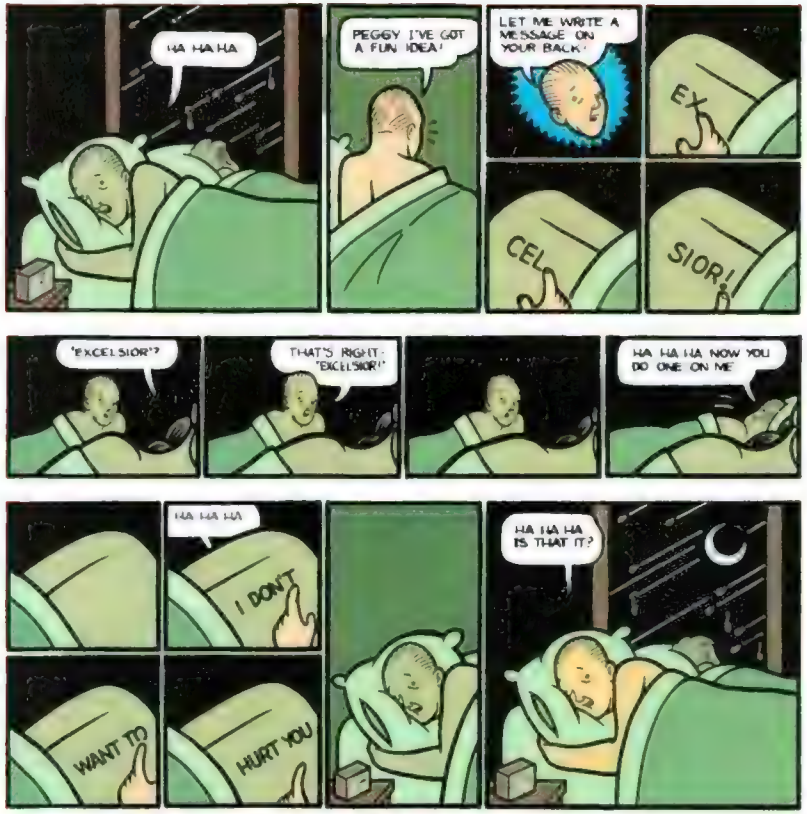
So far, so normal. This, however, is where it gets interesting. As there is a connection between comics and film, fiction, poetry, art, etc, Ware believes there is a more important relationship with music. "If you read any comic without words you'll still "hear" something in your head. It's not really like music. It's not even really tones, it's just a broken pattern of soundless rhythm. I had the inkling that these "sounds" were probably the root of what the real power of comics was... Comics are a series of symbols

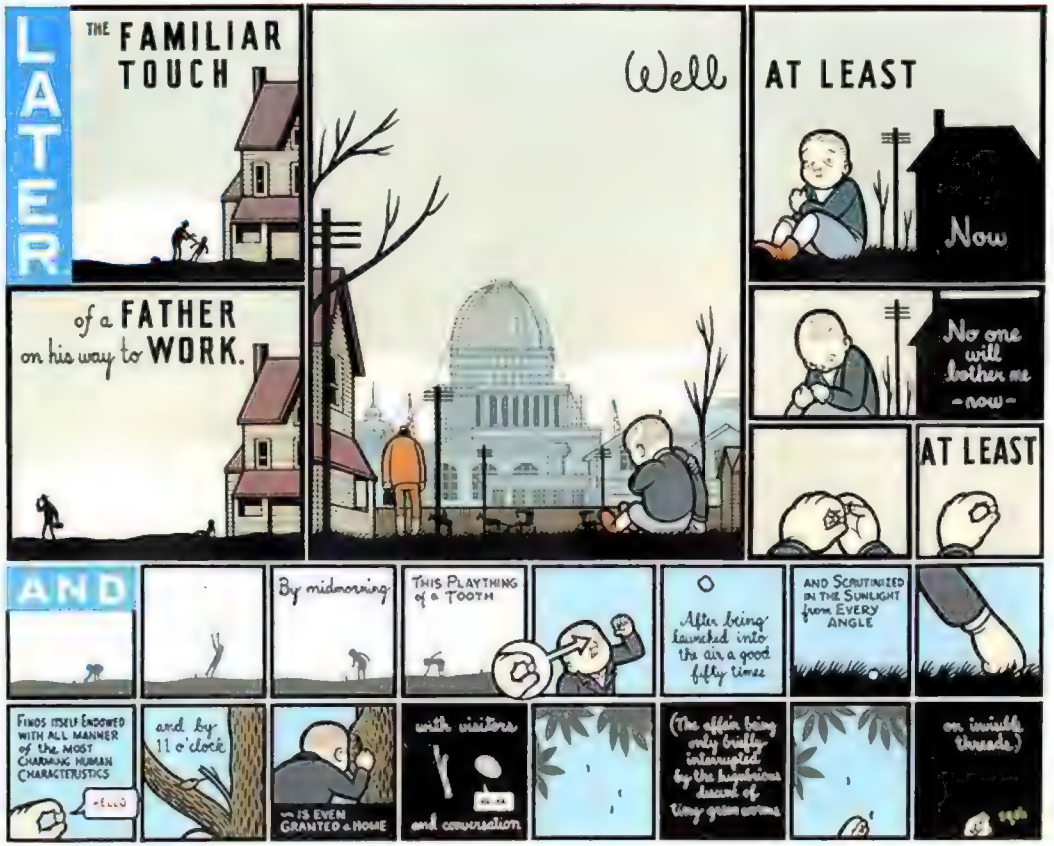


printed out on paper that represent a passage of events through time. In a way, you almost "play" comics in your mind like you might play a musical instrument".

Ware uses this to his advantage by making his comics "flat". There is depth to the art, but the perspective is layered. Looking purely at a row of panels it appears nothing is happening - whole passages of Jimmy Corrigan take place in restaurants or

Click on Globe returns to contents




LATER
THE FAMILIAR TOUCH
of a FATHER on his way to WORK.
Well
AT LEAST
Now
No one will bother me -now-
AT LEAST
AND
By midmorning
THIS PLAYTHING of a TOOTH
After being launched into the air a good fifty times
AND SCRUTINIZED IN THE SUNLIGHT from EVERY ANGLE
FINDS ITSELF ENDOWED WITH ALL MANNER of the MOST CHARMING HUMAN CHARACTERISTICS
-ELLO
and by 11 o'clock
IS EVEN GRANTED a HOUSE
with visitors
and conversation
(The affair being only briefly interrupted by the fabulous descent of tiny green arms
on invisible threads.)

All illustrations by Chris Ware from **Acme Novelty Library**, which is published by Fantagraphics.

Chris Ware/ Jimmy Corrigan/ Acme Novelty Library feature by: Phil Hall, Pete Ashton & Mike Kidson; photographs by Martin Godwin.

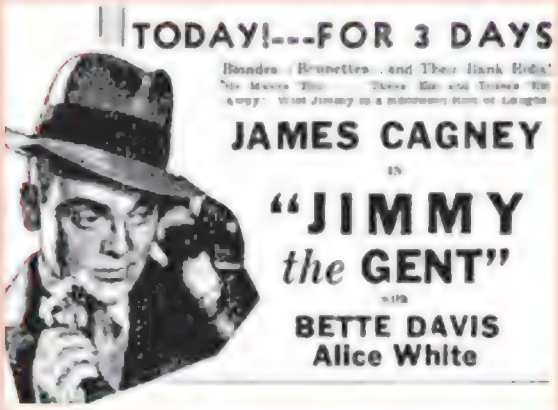
waiting rooms and the dialogue is more often than not stilted and difficult. However, when you read, or "play", the comic, it comes alive because the placement of the symbols is so perfect that it can do nothing else.

These are a few of the tricks Chris Ware uses in the creation of his art. There are many more in the book and definitely more to follow. To quote the man one last time: "Film is considered an art because so many directors have struggled and sweated and tried to push its limits. For some reason there's a real resistance in comics to that kind of change... Robert Crumb mentioned that the underground artists had worked their way through all the racist and sexist stuff and now they could all 'get down to business', which implies the urge to expand the form to something more sympathetic."

Chris Ware is one of a small, but growing, number of young cartoonists who are struggling to push the boundaries whilst making accessible, enjoyable and, at times, award winning comics. More power to them.

Quotes taken from a 50-page interview in ***The Comics Journal*** *#200 (December 1997) which is highly recommended reading.*

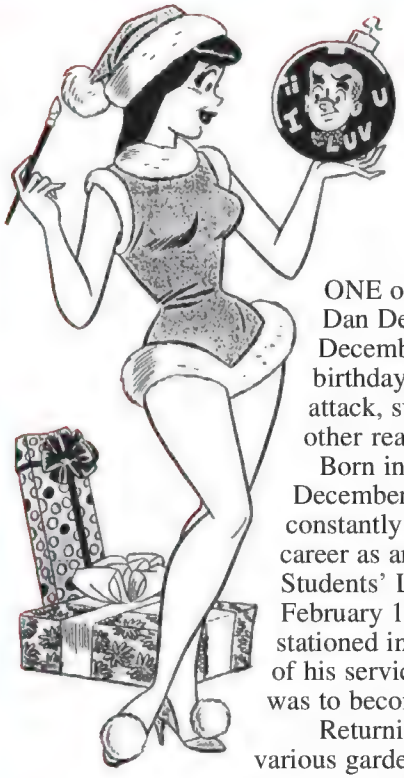
JAMES CAGNEY IS... THE REAL JIMMY CORRIGAN



Not only is Jim Corrigan the name of DC's The Spectre and a creation of Jerry Siegel, but the name first appeared in a 1934 film starring James Cagney and Bette Davis... Was this just a coincidence?

JIMMY THE GENT
(1934, Warner Brothers) Working titles: Always a Gent, The Heir Chaser: 66 minutes: Black and white
Based on the story "The Heir Chaser" by Laird Doyle
Screen story by Ray Nazarro
Screenplay by Bertram Millhauser
Directed by Michael Curtiz
Produced by Jack L. Warner
Starring James Cagney as **Jimmy Corrigan**
Also starring Bette Davis, Allen Jenkins, Alan Dinehart, Alice White, Arthur Hohl, Philip Reed, Hobart Cavanaugh, Mayo Methot, Renee Whitney

Click on Globe returns to contents



THE DEATH OF ANOTHER COMICBOOK GIANT

There are those that believe Dan DeCarlo's contribution to US comics history was as great as Jack Kirby's or Will Eisner's

ONE of the giants of American comicbooks, Dan De Carlo, passed away in hospital on December 19 2001, days after his 82nd birthday. The cause of death was a heart attack, suffered after he was admitted for other reasons.

Born in New Rochelle, New York, on December 12 1919, DeCarlo sketched constantly as a child and wished to take up a career as an illustrator. He studied at the Art Students' League in New York City, but in February 1942 he joined the U.S. Army and was stationed in Europe until 1946. In the last years of his service he courted the Belgian girl who was to become his wife, Josie Dumont.

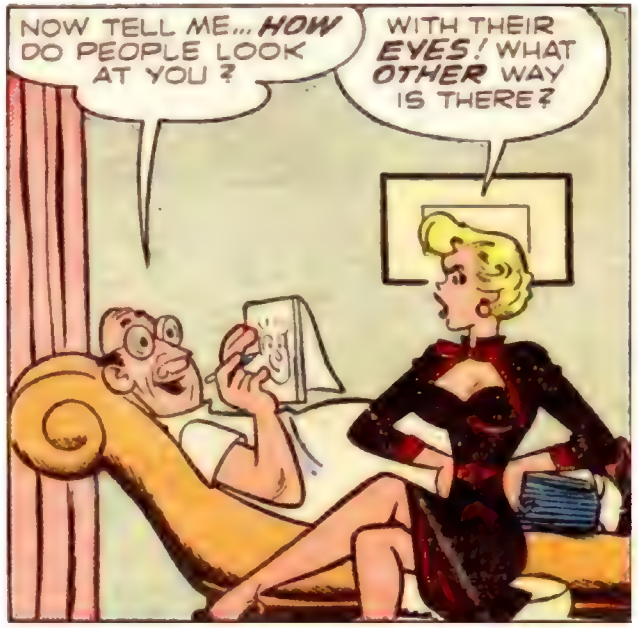
Returning to the USA, DeCarlo worked in various gardening jobs until, in Spring 1947, he saw an advertisement for artists by Timely Comics. He took in some samples, was hired by editor Stan Lee and set to work on the company's new titles for teenage girls, eventually settling in as regular artist on **Millie The Model**. The team of Lee and DeCarlo turned that book into Timely/Atlas's cash cow throughout the 1950s. Towards the close of the decade he began freelancing for Archie Publications, finally committing to them full time in 1961.

In his early work for Archie DeCarlo subordinated his own art style to that established by his predecessors at the company, particularly Bob Montana and Harry Lucey, but after the launch of **She's Josie** in 1963 his stylistic mannerisms began to dominate the company's books. By the end of the 1960s the Archie house style was effectively that of Dan DeCarlo and remains so today. Furthermore, by the same point in time the art styles used for the surviving teen humour comics published by DC and Marvel had adopted the same look. Arguably the scope of that imitation made DeCarlo one of the most influential cartoonists in the history of American comicbooks.

He continued to produce countless comics for Archie until the late 1990s, when a deal for a *Josie and the Pussycats* film was in the works. With a view to asserting his rights in the character DeCarlo hired an attorney to negotiate with the company. Shortly thereafter he was summarily dismissed. His last years were spent in litigation against Archie, while occasionally producing stories for Bongo Comics' **Simpsons** titles and selling original prints. The last story published during his lifetime may have been a *Batgirl* backup strip in DC's **Gotham Knights #21**.

Dan DeCarlo is survived by his wife, Josie, and two sons, Jim and Dan Jr.

Sabrina
PUSSYCATS PLUS ONE
PART TWO
WHAT A SHOW! WE REALLY BROUGHT DOWN THE HOUSE!
OH, MY! I DON'T REMEMBER GETTING HIT WITH ANYTHING!
ARE YOU SURE?
Josie AND THE PUSSYCATS
IN CONCERT



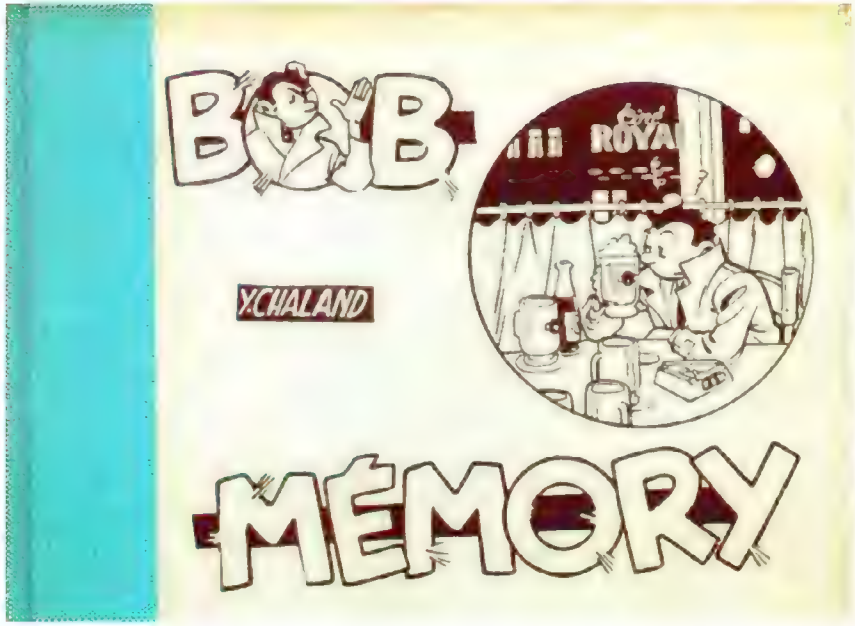
Click on Globe returns to contents

YVES CHALAND AND LA LIGNE CLAIRE

Brad! Brooks takes a closer look at one of the most important French artists...

LA Ligne Claire. The Clear Line. One of the strongest movements in European comics, and, some would say, even a type of philosophy driving many of the world's finest cartoonists. One of those cartoonists was the late French master, Yves Chaland. Influenced by some of the finest Belgian cartoonists, and by Belgium itself, Chaland left behind a formidable if modest collection of work testifying to the power of la Ligne Claire before his untimely death at the age of 33.

Chaland, born on the 3rd of April 1957 in Lyon, first discovered comics at his grandparents' house while spending his summers there. He found a burgeoning library of albums by some of the greatest names of Franco-Belgian comics: Hergé, Franquin, Jacobs and Jijé, all of whom continued to have an influence over his work for the rest of his short life. After a provincial childhood in Nérac with his four sisters and a brother, Chaland left the nest in 1975 to attend the Saint-Etienne school of Fine Art where he met other like-minded young artists such as Cornillion, Terpant, Biard and Isabelle Beaumenay-Joannet, who later became his assistant and then his wife. While at the Fine Art school, he and his friends published a fanzine entitled *L'Unité de Valeur*. The first issue appeared in black and white, while the second issue appeared in colour with Chaland doing the hand-separations, a technique he would use time and again.



In 1978, *L'Unité de Valeur* was seen by Jean-Pierre Dionnet, the editor of **Métal Hurlant**, and one of the most influential people in the Francophone comics industry. He immediately took an interest in Chaland's work and employed him, along with Cornillion, to draw five pages with three strips on each for issue 28 of **Métal Hurlant**: *"Menace à la Terre"*, *"Major MacDouglas"*, *"L'Univers est à nous"*, *"Bit Skateboard"*, *"Jack Crobard"* and *"Le Noël de Lucia"*. After this, Chaland's work appeared in every subsequent issue. He also sold a story called *"Un Coeur blessé"* to **Métal Hurlant**'s sister magazine, **Ah Nana!** Dionnet's interest in Chaland also extended to commissioning him to design the New Year's card for Humanoïdes Associés, the publishing house responsible for **Métal Hurlant** and **Ah Nana!**, and then offering him a job as a layout artist. In February 1979, Chaland moved to Paris to take up the job, which he held for nine months. At this time, after putting in a full day at **Métal Hurlant**, Chaland's habit was to return to his two room garret in the Rue de la Folie Méricourt and work on his strips. He also wrote reviews of comics for the **Métal Hurlant** magazine section, where he shared his passion for the best of comics from Belgium - something that was quite rare in France at the time.

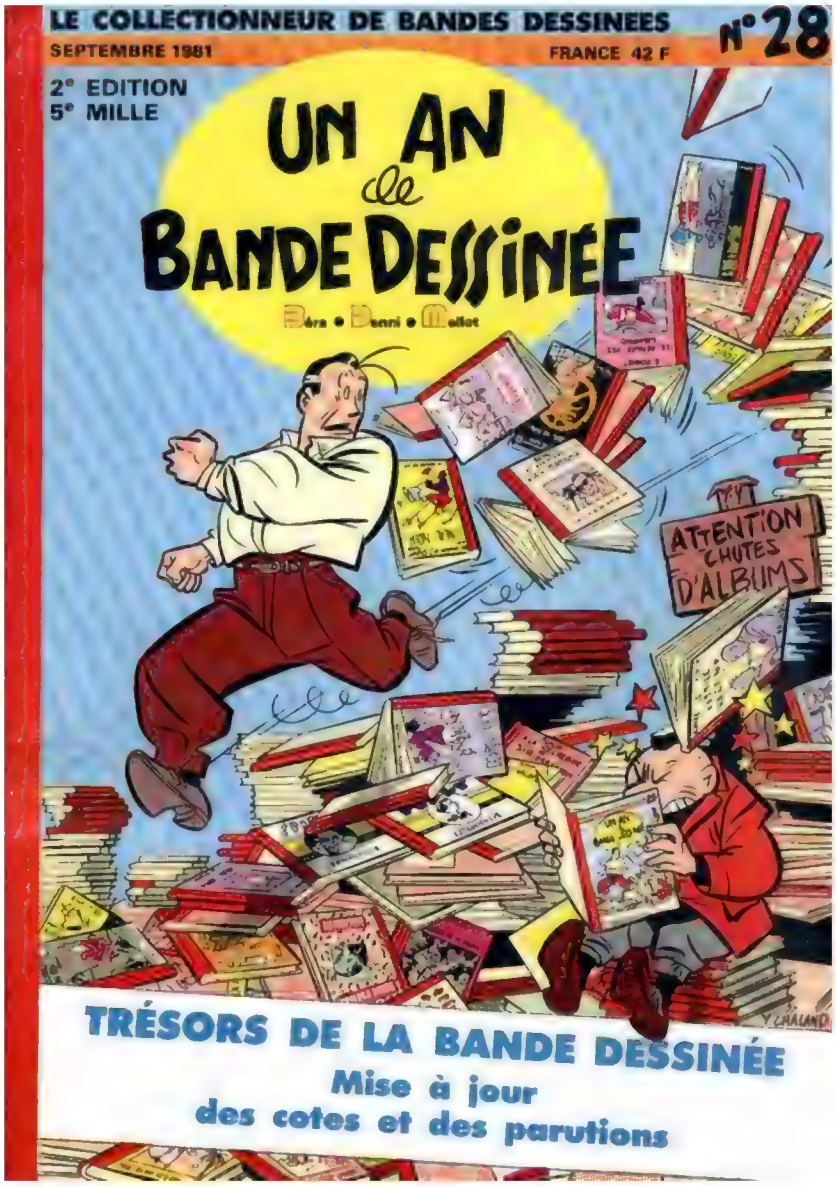
During this period his art was also becoming more and more driven into clear line territory. His linework was becoming bold and rounded, and far more assured than the work that appeared in those early issues of *L'Unité de Valeur*. So much so in fact, that at this point it may be as well to segue into a discussion of what the Clear Line is and how Chaland applied it.

The Clear Line, ostensibly created by Hergé and Bob de Moor (although the term was coined by the wonderful Dutch cartoonist Joost Swarte), is possibly the ultimate in reductionism. Every wasteful and sketchy line is meticulously removed from the finished artwork as the page is inked. Cartoonists who draw using the technique are working by the maxim "less is more". As the artwork has no extensive shading or hatching to show form and the direction of light, it is left to the skill of the cartoonist to show these facets by line and colour. In the right hands, the Clear Line is incredibly expressive, cutting the narrative to the bone by not misdirecting the eye away from the most important parts of the story. The only information that appears is the only information that needs to be there. Storytelling becomes paramount, and because of this, comics in the Clear Line style are often very involving – the **Tintin** stories being an excellent example. The apparent simplicity of the artwork, however, is just a ruse. The cartoonists who use the Clear Line are letting themselves in for

Click on Globe returns to contents

a lot of work. This, to me, is the basis for stating that the Clear Line is almost a philosophy for cartooning. The art is entirely in the service of the story; in Scott McCloud's series of classifications, cartoonists who employ the Clear line are Iconoclasts[1] - cartoonists who are interested in the actual point of their comics, to tell the story, rather than stretching the boundaries of the comics artform.

If we look at the process of creating a page in the Clear Line style, we will find that there are many different parts contributing to the whole. In Chaland's case, he would start by breaking the page down very roughly in his sketchbooks. He would often change things as he drew, according to the demands of the story, and would sometimes even write the dialogue as he went along. After breaking down the pages, he would start to pencil on the board, and although his lines were still somewhat sketchy at this point, Chaland would know exactly where he wanted to go with them. This final destination was accurately pinned down in the inking; Chaland would find the best line out of all the sketchiness, the very line that would suit the page best, and according to whether the line was in the foreground or background, use either a brush or pen to delineate it. Once the black and white art was finished to Chaland's very exacting standards, he would then set about colouring it along with his wife, Isabelle. Chaland preferred to do the colouring using the old-fashioned method of Benday hand-separations as he completely mistrusted technology. As he said in a 1982 interview, "One of the big problems in modern society is the arrival of scanners in photo-engraving shops; now, the chromatics specialist has disappeared. You take the original colours (the blue), you put it on a roller which turns very slowly, and an electronic eye analyses the colours and photo-engraves dot by dot. This passes directly to the print shop, which sends the original back to the author to avoid comparing the original to the printed result. (…) The old technique was rich and full; the range of colours the



scanners offers is very limited. There's still the Benday process; it's a lot of work but at least it boycotts the scanner. Just for that reason I feel it's a valid technique."[2] Who knows what he would of made of computer colouring if he was still alive?

Chaland also started to produce his first work for the advertising world in 1979, first drawing an abortive book for a soft drink, Cool, and then completing a giant album for the

Click on Globe returns to contents

Reader's Digest, centring around, of all things, a superhero. These projects were only the first step in Chaland's long dalliance with the world of advertising. At the same time, his love for the comics of Belgium started to become something of an obsession, culminating with his first trip to Brussels, in 1980 – a trip that changed his life and the focus of his work. In an interview in 1981, Chaland explained why: "A shock. I really had the impression I was inside a Franquin album. Everything was there; the poles holding the traffic lights, the faces of the police officers, the setting."[3] While in Brussels, Chaland met Daniel and Didier Pasamonik, the owners of the Belgian comics publishing house Magic Strip. They would be responsible for promoting Chaland's work in Belgium and the Netherlands, and for helping cement Chaland's vision of an imaginary Belgium in his head.

On his return to France, and in between his work for children's comics like **Okapi** and **Astrapi**, both published by Bayard Presse, and both completely under the spell of Chaland's work, he started work on his new project, *Bob Fish*. A tale of a Belgian detective, *Bob Fish* was first serialised in the pages of **Métal Hurlant** and then published as an album; an album that was to lead to him receiving the Belgian award of Chevalier de L'Ordre de la Confrérie Saint Michel[4].

Chaland's work at this time was on an exponential rise in popularity, and it was starting to be seen everywhere. In addition, Chaland created two other characters that were to surpass Bob Fish in both his and his public's heart; Freddy Lombard and Le Jeune Albert. Ironically, the last of these was an offshoot of Bob Fish, first appearing in that character's album as a minor player. In 1982, Chaland also realised one of his ambitions when **Spirou**, the leading children's comic in Europe, published his version of the title character in an adventure called *Spirou à la recherché de Bocongo*[5]. Harking back to the classic 50s adventures of **Spirou et Fantasio** by André Franquin, Chaland hoped that this would maybe pave the way for him to do an album length adventure of the Belgian concierge at some time in the future. After being invited to **Spirou** publisher Dupuis' head office in Charleroi, Belgium and meeting his great idol, the afore-mentioned André Franquin, he started talks with the Dupuis management about creating a new **Spirou et Fantasio** album. Unfortunately, both for Chaland and for us, the project was cancelled in 1986 by Phillipe Vandooren, the then editorial director of Editions Dupuis. The sketches, layouts, pencils and inked material later saw publication after Chaland's death.[6]

By 1984, Chaland was working hard on albums of Freddy Lombard's adventures and a regular half-page strip of *Le Jeune Albert* in every issue of **Métal Hurlant**, a feature that became incredibly popular, telling as it did the adventures of a young "scamp" in a desolate 50s Brussels[7]. Chaland's art was also reaching new heights. His linework was lush, with lovely brush strokes showing both form and expression. Many critics view the *Le Jeune Albert* strips as the peak of Chaland's work both in story and art, and in 1985 Humanoïdes Associés collected the strips into an album that has

NEIGE ROUGE
PAR Y. CHALAND
LE MAGE JOHN DIFFOOLSTEIN VIENT DE DECOUVRIR QU'UNE NOUVELLE ETOILE BRILLE VERS L'ORIENT. D'APRES LES TEXTES UN ROI EST NE LA BAS..
-JE PARS HONORER LE PRINCE SEUL. QU'ON MAINTIENNE SUR LE DOS CORNELIUS ! OUI, OUI AS SI SOUVENT REDONNE VIE A MON CORPS. AS-TU PREPARE LA PRECIEUSE SARKE ?
TROIS AMES SE RENCONTRENT ILS SUIVENT EN SILENCE LA MEME ETOILE..

since been reprinted many times, including a colour edition in 1993.

The world of advertising was regularly beating a path to Chaland's door too, and between 1983 and his death, he worked on campaigns for clients as diverse as Lois Jeans, Gepy shoes, Banana Cereals, Ghost cleaning products(!), Plein Gaz, Le Livre de Poche, Petit Robert dictionaries, Banque de France, RATP, and Citroën. Towards the end of Chaland's life, however, he found that working on the Freddy Lombard books (of which there are five[8]) took up most of his time, what with the extensive research that he put into each book, and that he had less and less time to put into other material. Even with these time

Click on Globe returns to contents

restraints, however, Chaland still managed to create illustrations and covers for a number of magazines, comics festivals and serigraphs, as well as indulging his passion for interior design - it was once stated that he had furnished his home in the "Spirou" style![9] In 1988, he even found just enough time to appear as an extra in Alain Resnais' film about an American cartoonist lost in Paris, *I Want To Go Home*, and to take a course in accounting, after which he became a tax advisor to many of his fellow cartoonists.

In 1989, Chaland finished the last of the Freddy Lombard albums, **F-52**. This work underwent several modifications after he showed the preliminary sketches to his friend and colleague, Floc'h[10], and was once again published by Les Humanoïdes Associés, but this time without any pre-publication as **Métal Hurlant** had folded some two years previously (see footnote [7]). **F-52** started to show a slight change in direction for Chaland, the art showing more space than ever before. The story was different too; even though it was an adventure like the other tales of Freddy Lombard, this story had an edge of psychological horror to it, and to the dedicated Chaland fan was somewhat of a shock. Had Chaland lived, it would have been interesting indeed to see if he had worked further on this theme.

On the 18th of July 1990, Yves Chaland and his daughter Samantha Louise Olivia[11] died following a car crash. Chaland's wife and long-time assistant Isabelle survived. This terrible accident robbed the world of comics of one of its finest exponents, and its readers of many more fine albums that would have invariably come. That Chaland was a master of the Clear line is in no doubt. Nor is his massive and lasting influence on the next generation of cartoonists toiling to create comics of worth and passion. The awful shame is that Chaland himself will not be there to see or participate in it all.

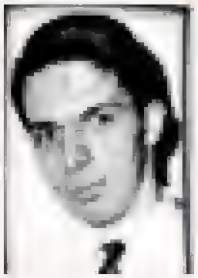
Translated Chaland

Unfortunately Chaland's works in English are few and far between. As far as I know, there are only four strips translated, and these all appeared in **Heavy Metal**:

Heavy Metal Oct 84: *Atomax*
Heavy Metal July 85 - Nov 85: *Elephant Cemetery*[12]
Heavy Metal Fall 87: *Freddy Lombard*?[13]
Heavy Metal Summer 88: *Adolphus Claar*[14]

The book **Chaland**, published in 1995 by Editions Champaka in Brussels, has both French and English text, and has an invaluable chronology that helped me write this article, as well as lots and lots of magnificent Chaland artwork. **BL**

Notes



[1]R.C. Harvey, "*Round and Round with Scott McCloud*", The Comics Journal No. 179, August 1995.
[2] Phillipe Morin, Pierre-Marie Jamet and Dominique Poncet, "*Chaland*", P.L.G.P.P.U.R. No. 10, March 1982. There is also a chance that Chaland is being a little disingenuous here. He was famed for leading interviewers up the garden path on a variety of subjects.
[3]*Le Soir*, March 3 1981.
[4]Isabelle Beaumenay-Joannet and Jean-Luc Fromental, *Chaland*, Editions Champaka, Brussels, 1995, Page 113.
[5]**Spirou**, Editions Dupuis, Charleroi, April 22 - September 16 1982.
[6]Yves Chaland and Yann Le Pennetier, **Les Inacheves**, Editions Champaka, Brussels, 1993
[7]*Le Jeune Albert* appeared in **Métal Hurlant** until that magazine folded in 1987 with issue 133. The strip appeared again in 1988 in Dargaud's revue **Pilote et Charlie** with a black and white page called *"Le Jeune Albert va à l'école"*.
[8]The five Freddy Lombard adventures are **Le Testament de Godefroid de Bouillion**, **Le Cimetiere des Éléphants, La Comète de Carthage**, **Vacances à Budapest**, and **F-52**. All these albums are published by Humanoïdes Associés.
[9]François Landon, *L'Evenement du Jeudi*, September 2, 1990
[10]Jean-Louis Floc'h is himself a cartoonist of note who also uses the Clear Line to tell his stories.
[11]Born September 23, 1985.
[12]This is **Le Cimetiere des Éléphants**, the second Freddy Lombard story. It actually first appeared in Dutch in the weekly comic **Eppo**, before it even appeared in French in **Métal Hurlant**.
[13]I don't have a clue what *Atomax* that appeared in HM Oct 84 is, or what Freddy Lombard story appeared in **HM** in Fall 87, having seen neither of these two issues. I'd love to know what they are though... Any ideas?
[14]This is the series of four science fiction strips first published in the comic **Astrapi**.

Click on Globe returns to contents

JUST WHEN YOU THOUGHT X-BOOKS WERE AS WEIRD AS THEY WERE EVER GOING TO BE...

IF YOU thought Frank Quitely was an odd choice for **The New X-Men**. Or that Marvel had made some decidedly odd artistic choices over the years for certain mutant projects. Then you're about to be blown away by a new artist whose first major professional comics work is a high-profile X-book.

Peter Ferguson is a new name to most people and with a style combining John Bolton with the weirdest Fantagraphics can offer, he's about to follow up his 7-page back-up strip in **X-Treme X-Men** with the lead role in **Muties**.

Talking exclusively with **Borderline**, series editor Mark Powers said this about the new discovery, "He's a tremendous artist, his work speaks for itself. We actually lucked into Peter; he's a friend of the first artist I approached for **Muties**, Salgood Sam. (Who will be doing a subsequent issue of **Muties**.)

"Salgood was lined up to do issue #1, but the more he and Karl Bollers spoke, the more Salgood became interested in doing another story with Karl, something more squarely up his alley. He recommended Peter, a friend of his, and the rest will be history (I hope, anyway).

"Actually, Salgood is doing thumbnails for Peter, as Peter has never done comics before. Both guys are phenomenally talented.

"On the writing side, we have Karl Bollers. Karl is also tremendously gifted, as I believe readers will see if they pick this book up. He's definitely taking a more real-world approach to this title – I'm especially anxious to see issue #3 hit the stands. It's a truly gut-wrenching story, on which he's collaborating with Dean Haspiel.

"Incidentally, Karl's been instrumental in truly making this a book of personal vision, as he's brought in several artists himself. Dean is one of them; Patrick Spaziante, who is doing issue #2, is another." **Muties** is out February.

Click on Globe returns to contents

FERGUSON ON FERGUSON

"I'm from Montreal, I'm 33, I've been doing mainly magazine illustration for the past six years for my bread and butter, this is my first time doing a comic.

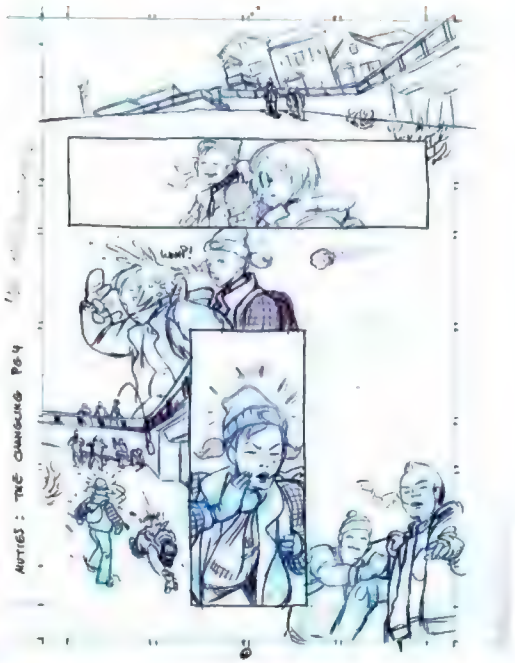
"As for working in this medium – It's insane! I don't know how comic artists manage to kick out 25 pages a month! I'm having a blast though, because I'm learning so much, doing five paintings a day.

"I'm a pathologically lazy person , I tend to feel overworked if I have to do three singles a week .The people at Marvel are being great about it – it can't be easy getting a panicky whiny phone message every few days... Anyway I hope the end product will work...

"I'd love to do another comic book, but I guess I'd need at least two months to do one. There's so many things I'd like to do, If you do comics you have to take a lot of time off from regular work, so I guess I'd better start being decisive for once... "shit or get off the pot", as it were.

"Thanks for the interest, but now I've got to chain myself to the desk again, whinge, mumble...

This page and previous page: Peter Ferguson's quirky and distinctive artwork for ***Muties*** *and the recently published* ***X-Treme X-Men 2001****. Also included here to the right is a blue line page of Salgood Sam's* ***Muties*** *layouts and a couple of exclusive Ferguson originals (left and above).* BL



BORDERLINKS

seanmckeever.com
writer • designer • remixer

MARVEL.COM

Silver Bullet Comics

BugPowder

Digital Webbing

YOUR LINK HERE

BORDERLINE AFFILIATES:

Want to become a Borderline Affiliate? You can either have a Borderline Download point on your site, or you can have a Borderline banner or button which links directly to our site – all you need to do is have something on your site which states clearly what we are and how to get to us.

ADVERTISE IN BORDERLINE:

½ page - 135mm x 190mm
£100 ($145)
¼ page - 135mm x 92mm
or 67mm x 190mm
£55 ($85)
1/5 page - 50mm x 190mm
£45 ($70)
Display Classifieds:
50mm x 90mm £25 ($40)
50mm x 40mm £15 ($25)
Banner - 10mm x 275mm £30 ($45)
BL Gold - Cover banner (15mm x 280mm) + ½ page advert
£350 ($500)
contact Phil Hall (details page 2)

Click on Globe returns to contents

artbomb.net – COMICS EXPLODE ONTO THE WEB

Warren Ellis continues his growing association with the Internet with a new venture designed to help people find the best in comics

ON January 15th 2002 *www.artbomb.net* launches. The new site is "dedicated not just to reviewing, but to promoting comics". This announcement comes across almost as a declaration of war - "For as long as there have been comics, there has been a struggle for them to gain mainstream acceptance as an art form. The drawn out history of comics isn't all that important to us. Suffice it to say, there are some amazing works being produced by a diverse army of creators and publishers that you might not be aware of. We want to put a spotlight on these books."

The site, launched by Warren Ellis and Peter Aaron Rose, will be a directory of excellence in comics, with samples and promos available on-line, and most notably, a catalogue of over a hundred reviews, to be added to weekly.

The site seeks to provide a free "outreach" to people who might otherwise have no idea of the wide range of material available in the comics medium. They will have links to facilitate finding out more, and hopefully buying the books reviewed. The launch will be marked with a spectacular-looking collaboration between Colleen Doran (**A Distant Soil**, see **Borderline #2**) and Warren Ellis (**Transmetropolitan**).

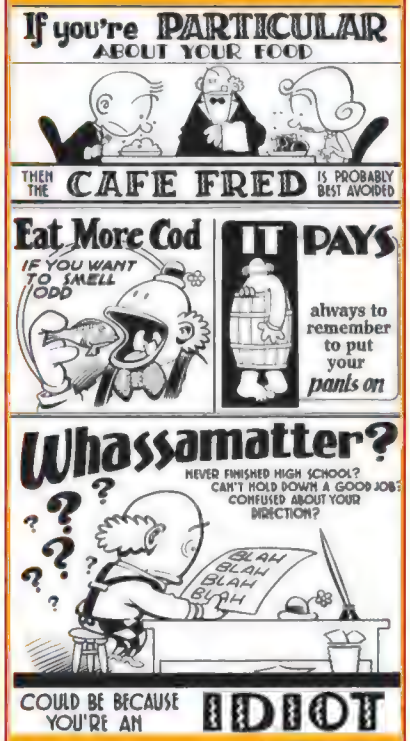
The story is called **SuperIdol**, and Ellis has been teasing readers of his on-line forum *(www.delphi.com/ellis)* about this for a few months. Rose says, "**SuperIdol** is a fascinating, disturbing look into the possible genesis of pop culture and technology. Colleen really poured her heart and soul into it. It's some of the best art I've seen from her–and that's saying a lot in and of itself!"

The close-knit team of reviewers will recommend books that they rate highly, rather than reviewing all comers. The site is designed by Brian Wood, creator of **Channel Zero** and designer for Rockstar Games. Contributing reviewers will also include Matt Fraction and Kelly Sue DeConnick, writers who have been prominent contributors to the thriving comics community sparking from Ellis's forum.

Ellis has been a very vocal advocate of change in comics publishing. He bemoans the triple emphasis of the medium on superheroes, on monthly pamphlets and on franchised work for hire - not so much on the grounds that they are inherently wrong, but because they should not swamp the wealth of talent in other spheres of the comics world. One thing about him is that he doesn't just sit back and criticise, but has been inspirational in a number of efforts to redress this. Notably, he is constantly promoting the work of potentially overlooked talent, not limited to contributors to artbomb.net, Colleen Doran, Brian Wood, but others such as Lea Hernandez (**Cathedral Child**, **Clockwork Angels**), Carla Speed MacNeil (**Finder**) and Larry Young (see AiT/PlanetLar article). Reviewing and recommending books, and providing original work free of charge shows committed activism from the busy comics professional. BL

FRED THE CLOWN

Issue #1 costs $2.95 (plus $1.25 postage outside the UK) or £2.00 inclusive in the UK and can be purchased by going to ***www.hotelfred.com*** and clicking the "Buy Stuff" button. Also, hassle your comic shop manager, that sometimes works!


If you're PARTICULAR ABOUT YOUR FOOD
THEN THE CAFE FRED IS PROBABLY BEST AVOIDED
Eat More Cod
IF YOU WANT TO SMELL ODD
IT PAYS
always to remember to put your pants on
Whassamatter?
NEVER FINISHED HIGH SCHOOL? CAN'T HOLD DOWN A GOOD JOB? CONFUSED ABOUT YOUR DIRECTION?
BLAH BLAH BLAH BLAH
COULD BE BECAUSE YOU'RE AN IDIOT

Or simply send a cheque for £2.00 to 132 Park Road, Chiswick, London W4 3HP made payable to **R. Langridge**

"Quite simply the funniest comic I've read in a decade..." Phil Hall, editor of **Borderline**

Fredvertisement

Click on Globe returns to contents

WORLD COMICS

Paul Gravett continues his trip through the diverse world of comics

The Other Manga

JAPANESE comics, or manga, are an integral, inescapable part of Japanese culture, "the constant chatter of the collective unconscious, an articulation of the dream world", as the leading American manga expert Frederick Schodt brilliantly put it. They would therefore seem to be an obvious and essential ingredient of any Arts Festival seeking to celebrate Japan. But not everyone is happy about the aspects manga reveal, graphicly and explicitly, about the Japanese people by tapping into their daily lives, their fantasies and nightmares. In Britain, in the West, in English, we are only starting to see this "Other Manga", the bigger picture beyond the samurais and robots, the **Pokemon**s and **Dragonball**s, the tits and tentacles. In 1991, as part of that year's Japan Festival across Britain, I was collaborating with the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford, whose director David Elliott was very keen to stage a major exhibition on manga in a British art gallery. He and I both wanted to include a very broad range of material, covering all ages and genres and not avoiding the more controversial adult content of some manga. A big Japanese corporate sponsor was interested and all looked hopeful. But sadly, in the end, the show never happened, mainly because the sponsor was uncomfortable with some of the explicit imagery and made their support conditional on this being censored and banned. There was no way that David and I could accept that.

Instead, I worked with Adam Lowe, fine artist and manga enthusiast, and Helen McCarthy, the UK's one-woman anime evangelist, to mount a much smaller, unofficial, non-Festival exhibition at the Pomeroy Purdey Gallery, on the South Bank near the Design Museum. Adam had some great contacts in Japan, Kyoichi Tsuzuki and Alfred Birnbaum, who enabled him to exhibit original artwork by six manga artists. Two of them were traditional, starting with the "God of Manga" and father of **Astro Boy** (finally in English from Dark Horse this year), Osamu Tezuka (1926-89), and Keiko Takemiya (b. 1950), a woman cartoonist who created one of the first really successful 'beautiful boy' gay school romances, **Le Poeme Du Vent et Des Arbres** (**The Poem of the Wind and the Trees**,1976).

The other four of them were experimental, underground (published by the "eccentric comics monthly" **Garo**) and unashamedly uncompromising: the erotic-grotesque elegance of Suehiro Maruo (b. 1956) (whose **Ultra-Gash Inferno** was translated last year by London-based Creation Books); the unsettling dreams of pubescent girls by Mitsuhiko Yoshida (b. 1946); the disturbing, depressive psychodramas of Kazuichi Hanawa (b. 1947); and the demented body-humour of Higirina Kouya (alias Atsushi Kikuchi and Tadashi Watanabe, both b. 1969). Needless to say, the exhibition sparked plenty of media outrage which stereotyped all manga as depicting sex and violence, drew unprecedented numbers of visitors and exposed the scandal of the Japan Festival's official denial and exclusion of any manga or anime from its programme (apart from one sold-out screening of Hiyao Miyazaki's wonderful film *My Neighbour Totoro* at the Barbican).

Ten years later, another Japan Festival began in Britain last May and continues until March this year. And, miracle of miracles, this time, among the more than 2,000 events all across the country, they have squeezed in a modest touring exhibition of 25 manga artists. It arrives in London at the London Institute Gallery, 65 Davies Street, W1 from January 9 to February 8 2002 (right next to Bond Street tube station, free entry, open 10-8 Monday to Friday). The Japan Foundation in London has adapted an exhibition which they first produced for France in 1999, at the Maison de la Culture du Japon in Paris. The main adaptation is the unexplained removal of four artists from the 29 exhibited in Paris: Jun Ishikawa, Nawoki Karasawa, Eiko Kera and Jinko Kobayashi.

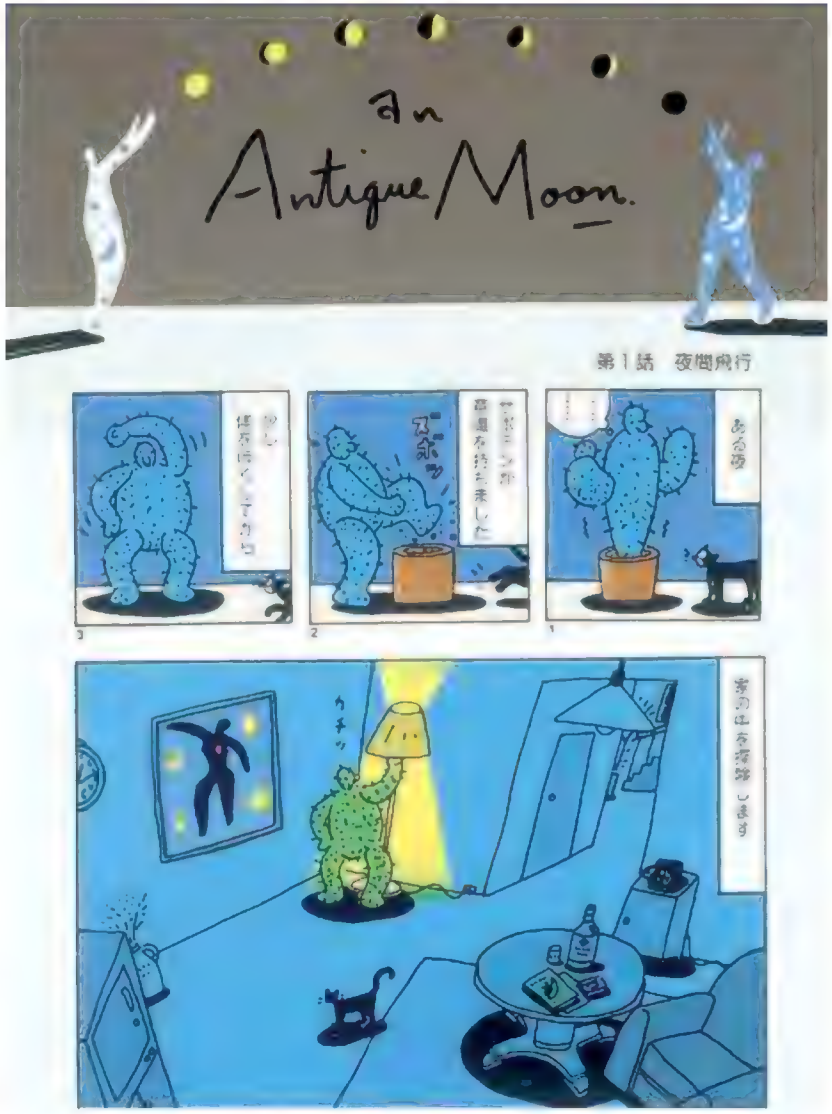
SUGIURA Hinako Uzuki (April) From Sugiura Hinako Zensyu6-Furyu Edo Suzume (The Collected Works of Sugiura Hinako 6-Elegance: Edo-Sparrows) Chikuma Shobo, 1996

Click on Globe returns to contents

Was space at a premium or were their works judged too difficult? And they have reduced the exhibition catalogue's content and scale, cutting down a 172 page large format book, with colour, additional first-rate articles, a listing of all manga translated into French since 1979 and a fold-out family tree of manga's roots from 1945 to today, to a measly 96-page, poorly designed and typeset paperback. It's frustrating that none of the manga pages illustrated in the catalogue are accompanied by their translations, as if somebody doesn't want us reading these stories, except awkwardly on the gallery walls. Nevertheless, it's worth picking up for just £3 as the only record and for what texts are there.

The strikingly original approach of this exhibition is to show no original artwork and to ignore the massive, overwhelming welter of long-running serialised comics. Its curator, Fusanosuke Natsume, has opted for short complete stories, which a visitor can appreciate as a whole to understand their pacing and diverse approaches. You are expected to read "in reverse", from right to left, across enlarged reproductions of the untranslated pages. Each panel is numbered and your eye then has to do the further gymnastics of finding the texts in English running in a separate column alongside each page. The concept is sound, but in practice it makes the reading process a discouraging chore rather than a revelatory pleasure. Are these blow-ups of manga pages so sacred that the texts could not be inserted into the balloons and captions to make them much more readable?

Despite my quibbles, the selection remains fascinating and mind-opening. Tezuka is rightly here again with a 1964 science fiction piece. There's an episode of Masashi Tanaka's lush wordless wonder **Gon**, the little dinosaur alone in our natural world (published by Paradox). And there's the unconventional, almost European-looking artwork of Taiyo Matsumoto, whose *Black and White* serial in **Pulp** stood out immediately from Viz's usual fare. I had previously come across and admired two others: Yoshiharu Tsuge had two memorable short stories in **Raw** (Vol. 1, No. 7 and Vol. 2, No. 2), and I'd enjoyed the French edition of Jiro Taniguchi's gentle, almost silent strolls through the lovingly detailed city and suburbs. The maestro of horror manga, Kazuo Umezz, now beginning to be translated, is also spotlighted here. These are the discoveries to be found, their work organised into the eight broad thematic sections of the exhibit. Women artists are strongly represented too, eight of them in all, including Hinako Sugiura's authentic Edo-period fables and Fumiko Takano's provocative portrayal of a senile elderly woman's effect on her family. There is a striking range of drawing styles, from delightfully strange, almost Outsider Art, akin to the grungiest of the American underground, to mesmerising historical precision. The introductory texts for each section and artist offer insights into the particular ways by which manga convey place, atmosphere, moods and time. The exhibition demands concentrated reading and is probably too much to take in on one visit, so plan repeat viewings if you can. BL



TAMURA Shigeru An Antique Moon 1989

THE London Institute is organising a one-day academic symposium on "Manga and Art: Visual Culture in Contemporary Japan" in London on Friday February 1 2002. Speakers from Japan include the curator of the current Manga Exhibition, as well as artist Makito Aida, manga expert Professor Jaqueline Berndt, art historian Professor Yukio Kondo, and from Britain comics historian Roger Sabin, with the whole day chaired by Professor Toshio Watanabe, now Head of Research at Chelsea College of Art and Design. The fee is £35.00 per person (£20.00 for concessions). Phone 020 7514 6313 or email dali@ chelsea.linst.ac.uk to obtain a booking form.

Paul Gravett is organising a "Manga Comics Happening" on Saturday February 2 2002, within the Manga Exhibition at the London Institute Gallery, 11am to 5pm, admission just £1 for adults, accompanied children free. The day will rally anyone interested in really good comics, including but not just manga, and get lots of UK small press, artists, comics creators and publishers displaying, demonstrating, teaching and selling their work. Established creators such as Woodrow Phoenix of **Sugar Buzz**, Lorna Miller of **Witch**, Chris Webster of **Wormwood** and Nick Abadzis of **Mister Pleebus** may be involved, as well as newer creators, hopefully to include London-based indie manga like **Japanise** and **Pause**. For further information, e-mail paulgravett@ freeuk.com

Click on Globe returns to contents

INDEPENDENT publisher AiT/Planet Lar (pronounced to rhyme with Planet Claire, *the B52s song) is jointly named after the comic fan/publisher Larry Young and the* ***Astronauts in Trouble*** *series which announced his assault on the comics business. He had been writing a fanzine for a comic shop in San Francisco, in which he profiled and recommended the comics sold in that shop. From that limited audience, he moved onto the internet, where I first came into contact with him when Warren Ellis recommended the action movie adventure that was* ***AiT: Live from the Moon*** *(then published by Gun Dog). Ellis said at the time "It moves like a big movie... but it's different. It's smart. It's entertaining without requiring a lobotomy. What* ***Astronauts in Trouble*** *is, I swear to God, is an intelligent summer blockbuster."*

WELCOME TO PLANETLAR – THEY HAVE ASTRONAUTS IN TROUBLE

IN 1999, Larry and Mimi Rosenheim took the plunge into self-publishing with the prequel ***Space 1959****, and soon after the sequel* ***Cool Ed's****. Around this time, they had decided that comic pamphlet miniseries were not the way to go, and switched to trade paperbacks. Larry discussed this decision in the True Facts column in comics activism fanzine* Savant *(http://www.savantmag.com/12/true12.html): " Instead of doing 24 pages of art and story a month, why not do 72 pages of new stuff every three months? It's still the same rate of new material, but this way a reader's got the whole story; beginning, middle and end... right there."*

Larry Young has been called the "Johnny Appleseed of Comics," has a B.A. in English from Clark University, and has worked in print since 1981. Young has the unique distinction of having daily involvement in all aspects of the comic book industry including creative, production, publishing, distribution and retailing. He is the Chief Visionary, Creative Engine, and Marketing Guru for AiT/Planet Lar.

Mimi Rosenheim has a Mass Communication degree from Boston University and an MBA from University of San Francisco. She has worked with all forms of print and digital media in the last ten years, provides editorial guidance for original works and oversees the Financial, Operational and Business Development activities for AiT/Planet Lar.

Borderline: So, Mimi is the business manager and Larry is the creative manager, is that right ? If so what conflicts does that present for each of you?

LY: No conflict whatsoever. We each do what we do best. I'm vision, Mimi's implementation. I come up with the cockamamie ideas, and Mimi makes it work in a business-like manner. **MR**: Every once in a while I have to tell him why something isn't going to fly, but just as often he may talk me into it. Larry has an almost intuitive grasp of the vagaries of the comics scene, so sometimes something that would never work in the real business world is exactly the thing that needs to be done in comics.

BL: What is the Planet Lar mission statement in more words than "making comics better"?

LY: Honestly, that's what I like about the ol' "Making Comics Better" slogan: that you can read it as a bit of a brag that by doing what we do, we're improving the state of comic books as a whole, or you can read it as we're just producing quality comics, superior to those of other companies. No matter how you slice it, we're backing up that motto, every month.

MR: That's what makes it such a good slogan, though, because it does distill our more elaborate mission statement into three simple words. Sure, we could say, as we do on the website, "AiT/Planet Lar is a pop-culture company dedicated to bringing high-quality entertainment to the masses through the creation of original projects or producing works deserving of wider recognition. AiT/Planet Lar is Intelligent but not High-Brow, Boisterous but not Obnoxious, Intimate but not Cloying, Humorous but not Slapstick, Unconventional but not Obtuse," but, honestly, "Making Comics Better" is much easier to swallow. Sometimes, it really does pay to be brief.

BL: With the "Making Comics Better"

Click on Globe returns to contents

motto isn't it a distraction to be producing photo & prose books and patches?

MR: I'd say that it's not a distraction to us, since those ancillary items are an "icing on the cake" sort of product, and whose existence really does make the comic book industry better by virtue of making outside observers consider comics more seriously. "Hey," these people might think, "I've seen **Harry Potter** caps and jackets and posters and patches and such. **Channel Zero** has patches and posters and T-shirts and behind-the-scenes books, too. How neat."

LY: I would say that folks who take marketing slogans so literally must be really confused by Chevrolet Trucks' "Like a Rock" advertising campaign.

BL:Do you have any criteria for selecting a book for publishing?

MR: There isn't really a rote set of criteria that one could follow; if there were, that would mean anybody could step in and run the company just like we do. "Action-adventure premise; check. Irreverent sense of humor; check." It just doesn't work like that. We look for high quality books from professional creators who have a unique vision and who understand the way we do things.

LY: That's it, exactly. On my own, I'd have probably answered even more nebulously. "A book that I like done by folks that I wouldn't mind having over for dinner, stay overnight at the house, and for whom to make breakfast in the morning. People I wouldn't mind listening to for five days straight at San Diego."

MR: You're funny that way. Publishing someone's work is like you inviting them to join The Family.

LY: Well, it is. I'm the Godfather.

BL: As a trade paperback/graphic novel publisher, have you made any headway in exploring more traditional book outlets?

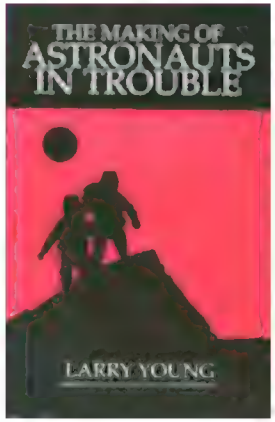
MR: Of course, our line has been available from online retailers such as www.amazon.com and www.khepri.com from nearly the beginning, but we've recently contracted with LPC Group, a distributor to the US book trade, and we're hammering out details for overseas distribution, as well, so as to get our books into bookstores around the world.

BL: What are you most proud of from the Planet Lar catalogue?

MR: They are all our children.

LY: I love them all in different ways.

MR: **Channel Zero** is our **Watchmen**, definitely. It just keeps selling, at the same rate, no matter what time of year. We have



to recognize the steady seller. And that one definitely was a turning point in the comics reading public's perception of our company, in that we weren't just seen as "self" publishers, anymore.

(To Larry) I know how you hate that.

LY: Yes. Before CZ, we were a "self" publisher who had Charlie Adlard, Matt Hollingsworth, Brian Wood, Darick Robertson, and Kieron Dwyer on the team... but, because I was the only writer...

MR: Yes, well, you're the writer/publisher now...!

LY: I have to say, I have a big ol' soft spot for the script collection, **The Making of Astronauts in Trouble** because that was the first actual book with my name on the spine. And it was a nod to my 15 year old self, who devoured **The Art of Star Wars**...

MR: And we were certainly ahead of the curve on that one. Lots of people thought you were silly putting that out, but now it seems everyone has a script collection.

LY: **Come In Alone** is good. That was a useful thing to add to the scene.

MR: I like **Astronauts in Trouble: Space 1959**. That one made me cry when I was editing the last part, and that's the sign of a good story, that sort of emotional impact on the reader. Charlie really did a first-rate job on the art on that one, too. Just really good, that one, from start to finish.

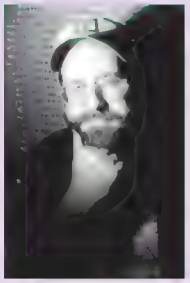
LY: Like I said, I love them all in different ways. The Alex Ross and Bill Sienkiewicz covers on the two **Foot Soldiers** volumes were feathers in our caps... the two **Sky Apes** were a vindication of our senses of humor... finding a new audience for **Nobody** and **White Death**...

MR: Every book is a new challenge. Some hurdle that needs to be crossed; some race to be won. We've been quite gratified with the reception our line of books has received, so far. It seems like there is a whole audience of readers who were waiting for us to start publishing books.

Adlard and Young posing in their genuine space suits

BL

Larry Young is an activist and an agitator. In May 1996, he wrote in his fanzine " We want quality comics. We want pathos. Engagement. Poignancy. Elegance. Falling-down Funniness. Instruction. Joy."



In September 1999 he posted the following to his AOL forum:

"Subject: Want to save comics?

...then shut up and do your own. Really. That's all that's going to save comics.

If everyone who has such strong opinions here takes all their time and energy and funnels that energy into producing comics that they think are of high quality, then they will save comics. It's that easy. Now, let's read your comics."

In one of his recent Loose Cannon *columns (14/12/2001) for* www.comicbookresources.com *he said "I try, every once in a while, to light a fire under the asses of the people who want to do a comic, but who, for some reason, just won't take that leap."*

Larry and Mimi are doing it their own way, but setting an example that people want to follow.

For more information about PlanetLar/AIT go to: ***http://www.ait-planetlar.com/ait.htm***

Click on Globe returns to contents

PLANETLAR - WHAT THE CREATORS THINK

THEIR most critically acclaimed book, and their steadiest seller, is Brian Wood's **Channel Zero**, a scifi-realist story of a dystopian future where TV and religion collaborate as the "opium of the masses" and where activist Jennie 2.5 sets out to use the media against itself. Planet Lar has also published Wood's C**ouscous Express**, a morality tale about families, scooters and fast food recipes. January sees AiT/Planet Lar celebrate "Brian Wood Month" with the release of **Public Domain: The Channel Zero Design Book**, which extends their range of "icing on the cake", this time offering sketches and deleted scenes as a further insight into the creative process.

Wood says he was convinced by "Larry's open enthusiasm and love for not only my book but for comics in general. The attention to detail and care they take in preparing the books, and their ability to market and promote like no one else in the business." He gets feedback regularly "and pretty much everyone is pleased that Planet Lar exists and (that) because of them (the readers) were able to get hold of the book... I can't imagine anything preventing me from wanting to continue publishing with Planet Lar. I have, in fact, two original graphic novels and a planned series of the same that I intend to put out with Planet Lar in the next couple years. It's the best publishing house in the business, in my opinion."

The Establishment's Charlie Adlard, (who collaborated with Larry on the **Astronauts in Trouble** books) has arranged for Planet Lar to reissue his Les Cartoonistes Dangereux project **White Death** in the conventional US format (see **Borderline #2**). He says "I can't think of a better person than Larry to do this - he's a good friend and I trust him with the project. We all know that Larry's a one-man sales machine which bodes well for something like **White Death** - which isn't particularly commercial - I feel he'll probably be able to shift more copies than its original run. I'm really pleased he has faith in **WD** too - it's great to keep a book like this [which is so close to my heart] alive."

Adlard's collaborator on **White Death**, writer Robbie Morrison, had this to say about Young's operations: "**White Death** was highly acclaimed on its European release, and hopefully - with Planet Lar's support and bookstore distribution deal - it can repeat that success in the English-speaking market.

"Charlie's had much more to do with the reissue of **White Death** through Planet Lar than I have. He'd enjoyed worked with Larry Young on **Astronauts in Trouble**, and figured that it would be good to have Planet Lar handle the long overdue re-release of **White Death**, and I was more than happy to rely on his judgement. Larry's well respected in the industry and has built up a highly successful independent publishing house, which is pretty good going in the current climate. It's very nearly a miracle actually, so he obviously knows what he's doing.

"He also understands the American market, and is interested in projects which push the boundaries of what most people view the comic-book medium of being capable of, which is something that definitely strikes a chord with me. In many ways, the object of **White Death** was to tell a powerful, moving, human story that stepped beyond the superheroics that comics are most often associated with.

"Of everything I've written - *Nikolai Dante*, *Blackheart*, *Judge Dredd*, *Maelstrom*, a major new computer game for Virgin Interactive - **White Death** is one of the most personal projects I've worked on. It's definitely the one I'm most proud of, and it'll be great to see it out there again."

Planet Lar has also brought back some forgotten or unknown classics in the trade paperback format, making them more available than they were first time around. **Nobody** from Sharon Cho and Alex Amado was previously released by Image. Darick Robertson's **Space Beaver** has been re-released in two volumes, with additional, previously unseen work completing the second volume. Robertson says that he was encouraged by "Larry's uncanny ability to swell your ego with his boundless enthusiasm to the point that you think someone might agree with him. And now many people are discovering (**Space Beaver**) for the first time and are enjoying it, to their surprise".

Tim McCarney and Phil Amara have seen their hilarious and surreal **Sky Ape** relaunched. They were impressed that Larry was more like a fan of the book than just a publisher. "When the book was first released in 1997, Lar sent me a very complimentary email, and then went on to push **Sky Ape** in just about any forum he could. Fast forward to 2000; Lar asks us if he can reprint **Sky Ape**. We didn't have to think about it long - we knew he'd do what he could to expand readership and hip more people to our unabashedly quirky book. The results are there... I believe Lar's printing of **Sky Ape** sold more copies than all four issues the former publisher put out. We get more mail now than we did during the initial run".

Earth X creator Jim Krueger has another study of the iconic power of superheroes in **Foot Soldiers**. He feels that the book did not get enough promotion previously. "There are a lot of people who missed various issues of **Foot Soldiers**, and thanks to Planet Lar they can finally get those issues". He always felt that **Foot Soldiers** needed to come out as trade paperback but his work on the **Earth X** series made it very difficult for him to have the time to make that a reality. He adds, "by having **Foot Soldiers** out as a series of trade paperbacks, it makes the cult following a little easier to join".

Krueger says "Larry is a nice guy, and I like working with nice people. They're rare. And being a nice guy has allowed Larry to create good, working relationships with retailers and people in distribution."

Planet Lar still attracts diverse works to their catalogue, with reissued collections and original graphic novels planned for 2002. Jeff Nicholson's **Colonia** will come out as a collection. Steven Grant (**X Man**, **The Punisher** and plenty more) told **Borderline**, "Larry and Mimi put out attractive product, they seem to know how to market material that would send most comics companies screaming from the room, I like them both very much". Grant says Planet Lar will publish "the **Whisper: Day X** graphic novel, which is now being drawn, and I am working on another original graphic novel for AIT/Planet Lar with a third to follow. We'll be re-issuing **Badlands**, and, as soon as I get the editing done on it we'll be doing a **Master of the Obvious** collection."

There's also Warren Ellis's **Available Light**, a collection of essays illustrated with his own photos, and **Switchblade Honey**, a space opera drawn by Brandon McKinney, who is also working with Larry on a superhero satire **Planet of the Capes**. BL

Click on Globe returns to contents

ISSUES

Carol Close has stacks of them

BLAH, blah, blah, **Couscous Express**, blah, blah, blah, Eddie Campbell's **How To Be An Artist**, blah, blah, blah, **Planetary**. Let's face it, these end of year lists celebrating the best comics of the last 12 months are all well and good but hardly what pernicious, spiteful old me would call fun. Nope, far more of a laugh than chucking out platitudes or stringing together superlatives is talking instead about those titles that sucked serious arse in 2001 - let's call them the Carlisle Uniteds of the comic world, the sequential art equivalent of Fred Durst, the… look, you get the picture. Now, come on, it's time we all gathered round the paper shredder…

Just A Pilgrim: This Black Bull mini-series was easily the nadir of a pretty wretched year for writer Garth Ennis, which also saw him return in a blaze of mediocrity to **2000AD** (on the Judge Dredd multi-parter *Helter Skelter*), bash out a batch of forgettable war stories for Vertigo and produce arguably the worst Spider-Man tale since Howard Mackie was in his pomp (*The Thousand* in **Tangled Web**). **Just A Pilgrim** saw the former **Preacher** scribe juggling his usual obsessions (violence, religion, black humour, macho bullshit) in a post-apocalyptic landscape peopled by bad guys straight out of *Mad Max*, while The Pilgrim himself turned out to be yet another of Ennis's increasingly dreary variations on The Man With No Name. Hilariously, JAP's penciller, Carlos Ezquerra, was named the "best artist in the world ever" at the Bristol comics convention in May, surely an act of irony on a par only with Henry Kissinger being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

Marvel MAX: It's actually difficult to isolate any one particular title from the House of Ideas' adult imprint for particular derision, as so far they're all pretty terrible. There was a time when Brian Michael Bendis was a hugely respected writer/artist with a particularly nice line in gritty crime noir. Now he spends his time on the thoroughly pointless task of re-writing Spider-Man's history (in **Ultimate Spider-Man** and **Ultimate Marvel Team-Up**), as well as hacking out **Alias**, the tale of a feisty but screwed up female private eye who used to be a superhero. Excusing the fact that **Alias**' premise is little more than a retread of Bendis's superior **Powers** title this is desperate fare, its first issue boasting plentiful swearing, anal sex, casual racism and, erm, Captain America, in a bid for sales and controversy. Even worse was the **US War Machine** limited series. Written and drawn (badly) by Chuck Austen, this weekly Iron Man spin-off was about as much fun as a funeral. Which is more than can be said for Garth Ennis's **Fury**, a series that has seen the former Howlin' Commando and cranky old warhorse reinvented as a hate-filled, proto-fascist who has sex with Asian prostitutes and uses the term "retards". Classy.

Vertigo: Marvel's mature readers imprint might have been a tawdry train wreck, but DC's older, more established version hardly covered itself in glory during 2001 either, announcing plans to cancel their one and only truly outstanding title (**Outlaw Nation**) while continuing to dumb down with the likes of **Codename: Knockout** and Howard Chaykin's **Angel and the Ape**, both of which mistook Carry On-style humour for satire with unsurprisingly piss poor results. At least **100 Bullets** continued to hit the heights quality-wise, which is more than can be said for writer Brian Azzarello's tenure on **Hellblazer**. A bizarre mix of dog sex, bad English accents and impenetrable storylines, John Constantine was more often than not a scribbled note in the margin of his own book.

Amazing Spider-Man #36: After launching the **Heroes** benefit book to raise funds for those who lost loved ones as a result of the September 11 terrorist atrocity Marvel continued to unnecessarily mine the subject with this exercise in mawkish nonsense from the pen of the usually reliable J. Michael Straczynski. And what did this gratingly portentous Spidey book, with its all-black, *Smell The Glove*-style cover, tell us? That it isn't Spider-Man and his buddies who are the true heroes, but those regular Joes of the NYPD and NYFD that risk their lives helping others every day and, gosh darn it, if only we could all learn to get on a bit better, wouldn't it be a nicer world. You don't say. May I also nominate the scene where Doctor Doom surveys the wreckage of the World Trade Centre with tears in his eyes as the year's most laughable and cloying, and point out that raising cash for the world's richest country while turning a blind eye to the plight of millions of starving Afghans sucks big time?

British comics: With the possible exception of Gary Spencer Millidge's increasingly sporadic **Strangehaven** and a few notable small press titles, what's left of the British comics "industry" has never been in sorrier shape. It's impossible to remember the last time **2000AD** introduced a genuinely diverting new character (maybe *Zenith* back in 1987?), while these days **Viz** is no more than a boorish "lads' mag" with slightly better jokes. And new kids on the publishing block, ComX, hardly set the world alight either. Their first few releases varied from the impenetrable (**RazorJack**) to the puerile and offensive (**Bazooka Jules**), and they failed to put out a single new book in the second half of the year.

X-Treme X-Men/Uncanny X-Men: Ah, the runts of the otherwise thriving X-litter. Claremont's **X-Treme** is so verbose it makes Jamie Delano's work on **Hellblazer** look like a refugee from Marvel's Nuff Said month, while Joe Casey's attempts at emulating Grant Morrison and Warren Ellis in the "I've-got-so-many-great-ideas-it-hurts" stakes is hampered by only one thing. He can't write.

Happy New Year.

BL

Click on Globe returns to contents

THE BLANK PAGE

The Dark Knight Strikes Out? Chev thinks so, here's why...

The Dark Knight Returns

AFTER fifteen years Frank Miller has returned to the Batman. What could have been an onslaught of publicity resulted in begrudgingly given, meagre amounts of press coverage, at least as far as the comic industry was concerned; almost as if DC and Miller had nothing worth saying about **DK2**. Perhaps they thought that the project would speak for itself or, more realistically, sell itself without impacting on their publicity budget. DC's *Previews* solicitation made much of Miller himself as the Dark Knight returning, and it is from this viewpoint that we can see what the story in **DK2** is actually about - far from it being about Batman, the entire comic seems suffused with polemic aimed at those within the comicS industry. You may like subversion in your literature, but are you so keen when it is aimed at you, at your expense, and while you are paying for the privilege of reading it?

The Dark Knight Triumphant

"This will be a good life…good enough." Bruce Wayne's words end **The Dark Knight Returns**, a landmark comic for the medium in many ways, and one that is regarded as the definitive last Batman story. It leaves little room for a sequel; in fact, the central moral of the story would argue against it, much less one set a scant three years later and featuring the actual return of the Batman. Frank Miller's outspoken negative opinions on Marvel and DC and their superhero comics would seem to indicate a distinct lack of interest in working again for these companies or on their characters. How has Miller reconciled such heartfelt opinions with a return to the superhero genre?

Consider this, the solicitation for issue one of **DK2** in Diamond's *Previews* of October 2001: "*It's been three years since the events of **The Dark Knight Returns**, and everything is just fine. Perfect, in fact. At least on the surface. What the world at large doesn't know is that it's a total sham. A perfectly choreographed, pretty little world where everything that's ugly, or even potentially disturbing, is all nicely wrapped up with neat little ribbons and swept under the carpet. Only he knows better. He's watched it fester to near-breaking point, and it's time for the only free man left who can effect any real change to bring it down around their ears once and for all. It's not gonna be pretty. But at least it'll be honest.*"

If you believe the hype that Miller *is* The Dark Knight, and insert him into the above quotation instead of Batman then it all becomes a little clearer. **DK2** isn't a sequel; it's barely, in any real terms, even a Batman story.

Hunt The Dark Knight

DK2 is only superficially a superhero comic. Miller isn't interested in those after all - if he were he would have realised that they have changed greatly in the past couple of years, largely due to the new edicts in place at Marvel. Despite Miller's grievances against superheroes, only he and his most fervent fans still see **Sin City** as something other than a superhero comic. Soon after the first storyline the elements began to show themselves: brooding, shadowy vigilantes; long coats billowing and enclosing their wearers like capes; scantily clad bad girls with champagne cork nipples; and the clichéd adage that "might is right". Nowadays the only crime in **Sin City** is the writing.

DK2 is just Frank Miller standing up and railing against the industry again. If you have heard or read his rhetoric before you'll recognise the patter. It's always the same old story, and it's getting tired, in the same way that **Sin City** withered and died for want of a new angle, a fresh perspective, rather than the same character in the same plot, series after series. You've paid good money for a Batman story; what you've got is a lecture.

The Dark Knight Falls

As **DK2** progresses, you'll be able to see familiar archetypes pilloried, institutions attacked and stereotypes mocked. But their relevance to the world of the Batman will pale beside their relevance to the world of the comic publisher, its retailers and readers. In **DK2**, Superman isn't Superman, nor is he Clark Kent; he is now representative of prestigious writers lackeying to corporations in the same way that Miller has Superman in thrall to his government. The dynamo wheel to which the Flash is anchored has little meaning in **DK2** other than to harangue DC and Marvel for the way in which it has treated its characters over the years, keeping them running in circles and powering their companies rather than letting them grow and move on. With Batman or the Question, you're listening to Frank Miller direct from the source and when President Rickard or his government talks, they're saying what Miller thinks is DC's and Marvel's stance on creators' rights and other such subjects close to Miller's heart.

Now, it's true that to attack a series after just its premiere issue may be a rash knee jerk reaction. But it will be interesting to read the next two issues with these thoughts in mind.

This column is interested in the comic writer and their story and, in this case, the devil is in the details. Between the lines, we are being aimed at; in the subtext, we are being laughed at, by a creator well past his best with nothing left to say or do but to rant at those - fan and professional alike - who have supported him in his career. We weren't listening to him before, but now we have no choice. It's a spiteful way to attack those who only wanted some of that old Frank Miller magic worked on the Batman once again, and it marks the nadir of a creator who once had so much to offer but whose creativity has, like the Atom's attack in **DK2**, become symptomatic of entropy:

Frank Miller used to be hot.
Then he was cool.
Now he's just cold. BL

Click on Globe returns to contents

LEARNING CURVES

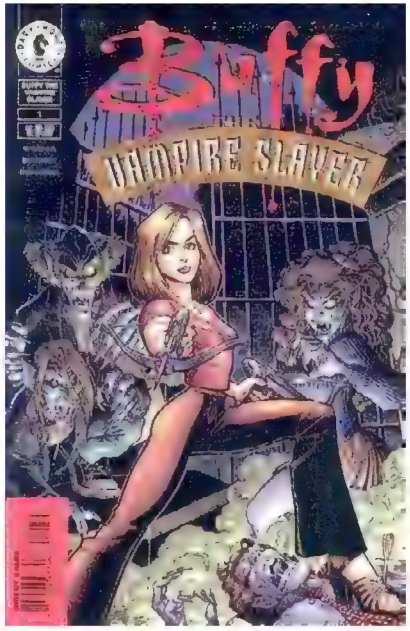
Sarah Littlehales speculates to accumulate

Buffy sells...

D'UH!

Pocket-sized Sarah Michelle Gellar has wowed her way into the hearts of millions as the eponymous former cheerleader over the last five years, and there's no stopping her. With her face already plastered all over television, lunch boxes, stationery and band aids, the Slayer inevitably entered the world of comic books. More than three years since the bottle blonde was first panelled onto the printed page, Dark Horse have themselves a steady success on their hands.

It's a dubious success, though. Early comics stories failed to capture the same intense mixture of fun, suspense and characterisation that enlivened the television series it was meant to be based on. The art was largely run of the mill and the writing surprisingly limp for Andi Watson (**Geisha** & **Breakfast After Noon**), while the TV show itself was glossy and full of beautiful people. As the show evolved to incorporate life in college, new characters and the loss of Buffy's first love Angel, the comic was still dawdling in mediocre stories of High School life. It was hard to see how the two media went together.



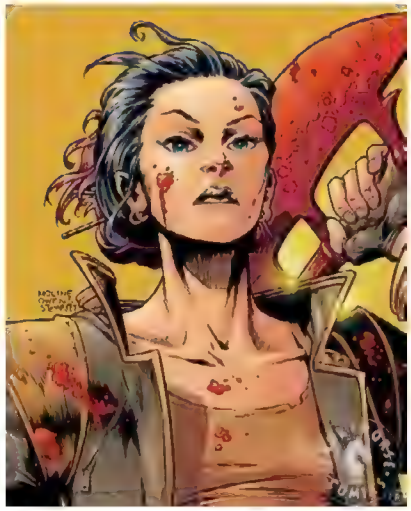
Today, nearly four years down the line, there's the original **Buffy The Vampire Slayer** series, trade paperbacks, an on-going **Angel** series and dozens of one-shot character spotlight spin-offs; each with the choice of regular comic art cover or photo cover. In an effort to stay up to date the comicbook now revolves around the events of the programme, incorporating characters and events from the TV show, while the covers brandish images from "hot" cover artists like J. Scott Campbell, Randy Green and Jeff Matsuda.

It's still uncertain as to whether it sells because of its own merits or just because it's Buffy, but sales prove that it's one of, if not the, most popular Dark Horse titles.

Unravelling Buffy?

Just as popular, if not more so, is the Buffy comic that isn't about Buffy... **Fray**.

Set in the 26th Century, a future so distant that there's no trace of the



erstwhile Ms. Summers or her Scooby Gang, Melaka Fray is the Slayer of Christmas Future. At first it sounds like just another pointless Buffy spin-off to cash in on, but there's one drastic difference to set this apart from the dozens of pointless spin-offs; this is written by Joss Whedon. The man who created the TV show and who writes and directs many episodes has got a gig writing comics. Like Kevin Smith before him, Whedon is another comic book fan who has finally got the chance to fulfill a dream by writing his own comics.

Geek success story aside, it does make a difference. Not just in the sales, which are more than impressive in their own right, but in the quality of the final product. This isn't some half-arsed attempt at a Slayer tie-in, but rather it brims over with Whedon's desire to create a new character, a new world, and to succeed in one of his favourite media.

Sales for **Fray** have reached an unexpected high and issue one has gone back to the printers, meaning that this eight-issue limited series could be coming back for some more Slayer action in the future.

Meanwhile, back at the House of Ideas...

Frank Miller's psychotic babe with an attitude and a death wish, Elektra, has come out to play in another ongoing series of her own. This time however, she's been tangled up in the world of Marvel Knights, much like her old boy-toy Daredevil.

Previously she's languished in her own anatomically over-endowed hell, as a bimbette ninja with poor sales. In an attempt to return to Miller's more mature take on the character, **Elektra** has now been handed over to the team at Marvel Knights. But those hoping for the psychological roller coaster that Frank Miller and Bill Sienkiewicz had delivered in **Elektra: Assassin** (Epic Comics) may have been disappointed. Instead of an intense look inside the brain of a psychologically disturbed young woman, this new Marvel title has delivered a rather banal effort.

Nonetheless, it's become quite a popular little number, much like the leg-baring red outfit Elektra is famed for. One issue in particular is in demand. **Elektra #3** was pulped after the bods at Marvel caught on to the fact that two whole pages depict their young Greek lady without any clothes on. As always a certain amount escaped the shredder to make its way onto eBay, this time with the help of Dynamic Forces, as they were in possession of a quantity of the issue before the order to be pulped was given.

I'm somewhat suspicious after the hoax surrounding the first issue of the Marvel MAX flagship title, **Alias**. Although the title was popular in its own right, a story revolving around a printer who refused to print any more due to its sexual content was later proven to be a publicity stunt. Could it be that flaunting "Mature Violent Content" in bold type on the cover isn't enough, and that Marvel now has to make its heroines scandalous to bring in sales? The warning for mature readers harks back to the series of 1986, but serves more to blur the distinction between Marvel Knights and Marvel MAX.

So be prepared to pay extra for **Elektra #3**, but don't go expecting an exciting peep show as the best thing that can be said about Chuck Austen's art is that it looks better than Frank Millar's nude news in **Dark Knight Strikes Back**.

Or on the other hand, you can pick up the entire run of **Elektra: Assassin** for around ten dollars, or the trade paperback collection for a little extra.

BL

Click on Globe returns to contents

WHAT IS MANGA?

Kevin Hill looks at another manga classic in this examination of the work of Miwa Ueda

Peachy Keen - the world of Miwa Ueda's Peach Girl

AH, ROMANCE. It's a beautiful thing, isn't it? Okay, so around Christmas isn't the best time to be talking about romance, but it is the season to be jolly, so we'll carry on. This month's series, which sits near, if not in, the romance genre, was nearly part of last month's topic - fashion in comics, for those who weren't here for that. Since the focus ended up switching to Studio Clamp, I thought it would be fair to give *Peach Girl* the full treatment - it does deserve it, believe me.

It would be very easy to get hung up on the artwork of *Peach Girl*. Ueda's art is very impressive, with the comic being, for the most part, simple line work, with a nice unobtrusive use of shading. Her art is also different in that the characters are given an almost real look, mostly by the use of poses that could teach your average US mainstream artist a thing or two. How many other artists can give High School boys that real-life, slouched, "don't give a damn" look? Miwa Ueda can. And does. Also of note are Ueda's colour pieces, which show off her obvious love of fashion, with the main character - Momo Adachi - modelling various outfits and looks.

So, it would be very easy to get hung up on the artwork, but we're not going to. In fact, it would be rather silly if the story was ignored, because that is where *Peach Girl* shows off the most. One thing you can be sure of - you'll hate Sae. You'll despise her. Actually, trying to describe the hatred you'll feel for her is not easy, but the reason why you'll hate her is nowhere near as difficult to explain - it's because of the problems she causes Momo.

Momo, however, has another problem or two. The first is that she tans very easily because of an unfortunately high melanin level - this is where the title comes from, as that's the colour she turns when tanned. The result of her tan is that everyone considers her a party girl, a beach bunny - a slut, in no uncertain terms. But, of course, she's not like that - she's just your average High School girl. Her other complications come in the form of Kiley and Toji, the two boys competing for her affections. Kiley is the comedy relief playboy, with whom Momo appears to cultivate a friendship whilst continually spurning his advances - usually with a closed fist. Toji is the boy whom Momo actually does love - he's a long-time friend, who even knows her well enough to correct those who label her as a party girl.

Love is never easy though, and that's where Sae comes in. Sae is Momo's "friend" - the use of quotation marks is required, since Sae is anything but a friend. Sae is a schemer, of the highest order. Sae would give everything to be Momo, or rather, to have everything and anything Momo has. And this includes clothes, accessories, and most importantly, boys. Somehow Ueda has managed to create the most stunningly manipulative character ever. You wont believe the things Sae does, even in the first book! All of this scheming mak *Peach Girl* much more than your average "boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy finds girl again and everything is happy" style story. Without the existence of Sae, the story would not warrant this discussion.

That's not to say that the other characters are uninteresting, as they're not. You'll recognise them as people from your own schools, the way they act, the way they talk. I guess you could describe *Peach Girl* as *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*, without the vampire slaying or the sarcastic dialogue - but with added spice in the form of Sae. Okay, so it's not the best description, but that's about as accurate as you're going to get. It's fast paced, it will make you angry when Sae gets her way, it will make you happy when she doesn't, and occasionally it will make you laugh or sigh - it's good, it's fun, and it's fairly inexpensive, being part of Toykopop's girl's magazine **Smile** and collected as one of Tokyopop's Chix Comix Pocket Editions.

Did you notice that last sentence? The use of the words "girls" and "Chix"? If the romance comments didn't put you off, there's a chance those two words did - especially if you're male. But that's the wrong attitude. Yes, *Peach Girl* is a comic that focuses on a school girl's love life, and yes, it is obviously aimed at girls, but it is just as much a slice of life comic as, say, Dan Clowes' **Ghost World**. It's a different slice of life, but one nonetheless. So read it, and if you like it - pass it on! BL

Click on Globe returns to contents

MAN ON A MISSION

Martin Shipp's vision of a better comics industry

RIGHT - **Amazing Spider-Man #36**, the World Trade Centre issue. This column isn't part of **Borderline**'s review section and as such it tries not to focus on any one given publication, but I have to say that this book stank. I say this as somebody who has returned to this particular title after too many years of seeing it decline to a pale imitation of itself, and who believes the current run by the writer J. Michael Straczynski and artist John Romita Junior is a very fine run indeed.

However, the problem with **AS-M #36**; it was an excuse. It took a real world event and made it an excuse for the failure of the superhero, that creature created to be a saviour, to fulfil its purpose. In it, Spider-Man says (and I quote): "We could not see it coming. We could not be here before it happened. We could not stop it." He says that none of the superheroes in Marvel Universe New York could have done anything about the suicide attacks on the city last September, because there was no way they could have known about them.

Bollocks. This is a universe in which, much like our own, the impossible is commonplace, but with the difference that the impossible is seen to be commonplace on a daily basis. This is a universe where an enormous helicopter, packed to the gills with surveillance equipment, owned and manned by the world's finest peacekeepers, is in permanent low orbit. This is a universe where entire buildings are wrenched from their foundations and pulled into the higher atmospheres by devices small enough to be held in the hand. This is a universe where beings with incomprehensible powers are able to prevent disasters with nanoseconds to spare and, if they fail, are able to go back in time and try again.

This is a universe where those on the doomed planes were able to phone their loved ones just as they were in our own. The comic even makes this all too clear by actually showing one of those last, unimaginably personal calls. This is a universe where many innocents died and many others died in trying to aid them, just as in our own. But whereas in our world we could only sit in mute horror at these events, in the world populated by beings like Spider-Man things not only could have been, but *should* have been, far different.

Yet this is a world where nobody monitored those last emotionally charged phone calls on the SHIELD helicarrier, where nobody used their final moments to call the Avengers or the Fantastic Four, where Thor or Iron Man were unable to use their astonishing strengths to divert the planes away from their targets, or rip the doors away like tissue and render the terrorists harmless.

To have actually acknowledged the terrorist attacks in a way that even suggested any possible other outcome would be to belittle them and their victims in far more terrible a way than the comicbook in question actually did, of course. But the main problem here is that any acknowledgement was made of the attacks at all.

As I stated earlier, the Marvel Comics characters live in a fictional "universe". This universe was based, many years ago, on our own and so features real places, whereas other "universes" tend to be our own hidden behind a comedy nose and spectacles. By being a mirror of our own world, this fictional reality has two options. It can feature real events without mentioning specifics, as was done often during the 1970s and especially post-Watergate; or it can ignore those events altogether. What it cannot do is show real events being changed, altered or affected in any way by its inhabitants, for their involvement then makes the events obviously fictional rather than "realistic". This lends a distancing which is exactly the opposite of what was intended by making the settings "real" in the first place.

Moreover, **AS-M#36** has opened a Pandora's Box for Marvel; now that they have acknowledged the events, what do they do next? More importantly, what do their characters do next? Does US War Machine live up to its name and raze Afghanistan? Do The Avengers live up to theirs and hunt down Osama bin Laden with the object of terminating him? It's unlikely, isn't it?

There's nothing they can do, and that clarifies my argument with the comic. I'm not angry that the characters can do nothing. I'm angry that the comic features these superheroes, these godlike beings, doing what they damned well should be doing; helping. But they're all doing it in ways that are no different from the firemen and policemen and ambulancemen working alongside them. They're not being super, they're being ordinary, because that's all they can be. To be anything else in these circumstances would be offensive to the utmost degree. As a result, the superhero and the myth of superpowers are shown to be the sham they are.

Yet the entire comic celebrates this: everybody stands tall and proud just as they would if they'd just banished yet another cosmic threat at the conclusion of yet another summer crossover. Even supposed irredeemables such as Doctor Doom and Magneto (Magneto, who could clear all of Ground Zero with one wave of his hand) strike the same heroic poses.

In short, **Amazing Spider-Man #36** showed the superhero to be impotent, but chose to do so in a way that celebrated the fact rather than being ashamed of it. And that, to me, makes it a very unpleasant comicbook indeed. BL

Click on Globe returns to contents

COMICS MILESTONES

Mike Kidson continues his exploration of key moments in the history of comicbooks

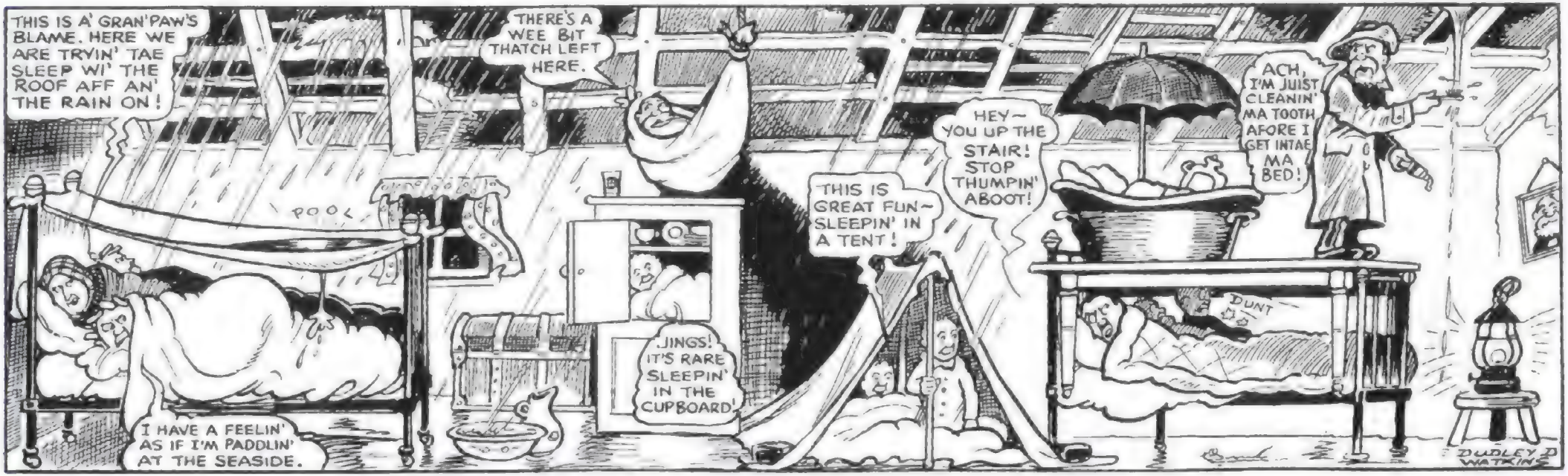
FOR the first time since **Borderline** began I've acquired a new book that can be discussed within this column. Furthermore, British readers might like to note that if they scoot down to their local branch of W.H. Smith they may well be able to pick up this item in the sales for just £1.99 – which is something of a bargain.

This is the sixth successive year in which the Scottish publisher of newsprint, DC Thomson, has put out a new hardback collection of **The Broons** and **Oor Wullie**, the two strips which have been appearing in their weekly The Sunday Post since 1936. Annual collections of the strips have been a staple on the newsagents' shelves around year's end for decades now, but these six hardbacks have focussed on reprinting older examples – material which is otherwise impossible to access except on microfiche in a very few libraries. To the comics fan with an interest in history they're invaluable, not just because of the rarity of the material but because it represents arguably the finest strip work of one of the most important creators in the history of British comics, Dudley D. Watkins.

Watkins, born in 1907 in Manchester and trained for a while at art school in Nottingham, accepted a post as staff artist with Thomson in 1925 and worked for them in their home town of Dundee until he died in 1969. His numerous creations for their weekly comics – *Desperate Dan*, *Lord Snooty and his Pals*, *Ginger*, *Corky the Cat* and many more – are amongst the most famous of British comics characters, known to almost everyone in Britain. But he was not just an effective creator of memorable strip characters; Watkins was also a highly distinctive and ingenious artist whose style influenced so many others that he can undoubtedly be named as one of the few outstandingly defining forces in British comics. Hence any new collection of his work is more than welcome and may be counted as a milestone publication.

And of the 6 of these Watkins volumes published so far, **The Broons and Oor Wullie -A Rare Treat** is perhaps the one of most interest to anyone who wishes to view the development and change in the work of this influential artist. The first four volumes reprinted examples of **The Broons** and **Oor Wullie** decade by decade, the fifth focussed rather randomly on how they reflected various social customs. This latest one, by placing the strips in chronological order, draws the attention as much to the artist as to the strip. One can plainly see Watkins's early influences: Tom Browne distinctive comic poses, loose cross-hatching and minimally sketched backgrounds are unmistakably present in the mid 1930s examples, as is a touch of Rudolph Dirks's way with eyes and faces. By 1939, though, Watkins's own style is emerging. Stock poses give way to a more realistic body language, lines become firmer and more fluent, panel layouts become dynamic – a trait which persists in **Oor Wullie** but gives way to a more detailed, static approach in **The Broons**.

These two strips are often treated almost as one; perhaps it isn't surprising given that both were drawn by the same artist for the same newspaper, but in fact

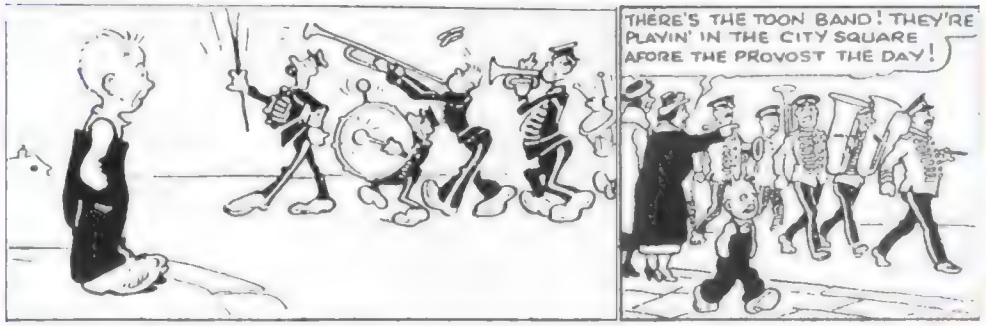

THIS IS A' GRAN'PAW'S BLAME. HERE WE ARE TRYIN' TAE SLEEP WI' THE ROOF AFF AN' THE RAIN ON!
THERE'S A WEE BIT THATCH LEFT HERE.
POOL
I HAVE A FEELIN' AS IF I'M PADDLIN' AT THE SEASIDE.
JINGS! IT'S RARE SLEEPIN' IN THE CUPBOARD!
THIS IS GREAT FUN~ SLEEPIN' IN A TENT!
HEY~ YOU UP THE STAIR! STOP THUMPIN' ABOOT!
ACH, I'M JUIST CLEANIN' MA TOOTH AFORE I GET INTAE MA BED!
DUNT
DUDLEY D WATKINS

Click on Globe returns to contents

Watkins responded to two different scenarios with equally different storytelling methods. Wullie is a young lad, forever getting into scrapes with his pals, and by 1940 his adventures were being told in a series of small panels which allowed a great deal of plot and action to be included, but also resulted in a hectic, madcap sense of pacing with one event flowing straight into the next. **The Broons** is about the domestic misadventures of a flat-dwelling family of eleven; with such a large cast Watkins necessarily employed large panels, and also made much more use of sudden cuts between set pieces, producing plots no less busy than those in **Oor Wullie** but seemingly more static and deliberate. More realistic, too – although on one level the realism of body language is tempered by an ingenious distortion of setting (the Broon's would have to be the size of a ballroom to accommodate all the antics Watkins fits into it!), in appearance Wullie and his pals look much the same today as they did in 1936, whereas the clothing of the younger Broons has changed constantly to reflect shifts in fashion.

Thee are extraordinary feats of layout and narrative pacing to be found in every strip in this collection, but it's clear that Watkins hit his peak, on **The Broons** in particular, during the 1940s. His style had matured and become quite individual, he was entirely comfortable with the characters and his workload was rather lower than it would ever be again, due to paper rationing and a consequent reduction in the size of the weekly Thomson humour comics to which he also contributed. The result was a long sequence of confidently drawn, highly inventive strips that remain unsurpassed in the history of British comics, and which the panel shown here, from a March 1949 Broons episode, only really hints at.

The Broons and Oor Wullie - A Rare Treat, ISBN 0-85116-785-3, is published by DC Thomson and can be ordered, as can earlier volumes in the series, from their website, www.dcthomson.co.uk/annuals. A word of warning to readers whose first language isn't English; both strips are written in a Scots dialect which may be tricky to read! However, Watkins's drawings, in both the English and Scots sense of the word "rare", will still provide a Rare Treat!



The changing style of Oor Wullie: from large panels and comedy in the style of Tom Browne (1936, left) to a concise, streamlined and individual realism (1946, right). BL

22 CREATORS! 8 AMAZING STORIES!
LOOK FOR IT IN THE JANUARY PREVIEWS!
IN SHOPS THIS MARCH!
Digital Webbing
PRESENTS
issue #2 - only $2.95
The Talent Engine for the comics industry presents the second issue showcasing the best professional and new talent found on the Internet, including Scott Morse (Magic Pickle, Soulwind).
48 pages of sci-fi, horror, humor, action and adventure for only $2.95!
Wraparound cover by Skott Young (Iceman, Undertow).
Creators in this issue: Matt Starnes, Diego Jourdan, Diego Barreto, Randy Buccini, LA Gould JR, Kombo Chapfika, Chris Mendoza, Steven O'Connell, Jeremy K. Fiest, Ray Dillon, Bryan Imhoff, Brad Green, John Muth, Mike Scigliano, Scott Morse, Jason Powell, Ken Haeser, Jerry Ma, Jimmy Ma, Rich Ma, Gary Lister, Shelby Miller.
THE TEAM
DRAGON
48 PAGES!

Click on Globe returns to contents

OF COURSE YOU KNOW THIS MEANS WAAUGH!!!

Although he's written many stories for many publishers and has worked in other media than comics, the name of Steve Gerber is inextricably bound with that of his most famous creation, Howard The Duck. Some spectacular fallings-out with Marvel Comics regarding the ownership and treatment of Howard made it seem that Gerber would never work on the Duck again, until the announcement that a new series written by Gerber and drawn by Phil Winslade was to be published. With the first issue of the series hitting stores and with a Marvel Essentials paperback collecting the first run of his ***Howard The Duck*** *series, Steve Gerber talked via e-mail with* ***Borderline****'s Martin Shipp.*

BORDERLINE: The question most people wanted asked: what brought you back to Marvel and specifically to Howard? Is Joe Q really that good at luring disaffected creatives back to the House?

Steve Gerber: Joe is a charmer, no doubt about it, but it did take more than charm to bring me back to Marvel.

Phil Winslade, with whom I'd collaborated on **Nevada** at Vertigo, first championed the idea of a new **Howard the Duck** series and convinced editor Stuart Moore to call me about it. I knew Stuart from Vertigo, also. I doubt I would have been able to take the idea of a new duck book seriously at all if not for Phil and Stuart's involvement in it.

Even so, there was more than enough skepticism on all sides at first. Joe Quesada and, I believe, Bill Jemas both were concerned that the character might have been strictly a '70s phenomenon and that it couldn't be made to work for a contemporary audience. For my part, I had a difficult time believing that Marvel would allow me to write the book the way I felt it had to be written for a post-**Preacher**, post-**Transmetropolitan** readership. And, of course, in a larger sense, based on extensive past experience, I wasn't sure I could trust the company to keep its word about anything. It doesn't exactly have a sterling track record in that regard.

Anyway, Stuart asked me to write up a short story synopsis to give Joe and Bill some indication of how I felt the character should be handled. I resisted that at first - I didn't think I should have to audition for this gig - but ultimately decided it would be the best way to find out whether Marvel actually had the balls to publish the kind of book I was envisioning. So I did a two- or three-paragraph synopsis of a story that had something to offend just about everybody and sent that off to Stuart.

A day or two later, Stuart emailed back to say that Joe and Bill loved it and wanted to proceed with the book. At that point, I made a mental list of the plusses (Phil as artist, Stuart as editor, support for my vision of the book at the executive level) and compared it to a list of the minuses (my long and mostly unpleasant history with Marvel) and decided it was worth taking a chance.

So far, I haven't been sorry.

> *"...readership expects sex and violence to be dealt with more frankly".*

*BL: You refer to "the post-**Preacher**, post-**Transmetropolitan** readership"; there's a lot more freedom given to creators these days (though still within certain editorial boundaries). Is this freedom leading to lazier writing? Is the freedom to directly show or refer to a subject or an act taking away any responsibility for the writer to discover ways to communicate in less graphic but equally (or more) effective fashion? And do you think the "post-**Preacher**" readership expects - or demands - more direct expression of, say, violence or sex? (and I'm sorry that's such a long-winded question. I'm tempted to add "Answer on one side of the paper only.")*

SG: I don't think freedom of expression leads to lazy writing, no. Any blame for that should be ascribed to lazy writers and editors who let them get away with it.

I don't think the freedom to express ideas or depict dramatic situations explicitly has put an end to subtlety, either. Some of the best writers in comics - Morrison, Ennis, Ellis, Bendis, Miller, Moore - have also been among the most explicit. But all of those guys also know when the implicit approach is more effective. The problems arise when you get less thoughtful writers trying to *imitate* their work. The surface features of that work are relatively easy to duplicate; its underlying structure and meaning are not. Unfortunately, the surface features alone are saleable these days, so - to draw an analogy from another medium - for every *Apocalypse Now* you're likely to get ten boneheaded *Rambo* knockoffs. Ultimately, it's up to the audience to draw the distinction and support the better work.

I do think the "post-***Preacher***" readership expects sex and violence to be dealt with more frankly, but I don't have a problem with that - probably because it would be almost impossible to deal with those subjects *less* frankly than was necessary under the Comics Code. On the other hand, there has been an unfortunate tendency to define "mature readers'" comics as merely those that meet a certain level of explicitness in language, violence, and sex.

For that very reason, I went out of my way *not* to use the words "fuck" or "shit" in the first new issue of **Howard The Duck**. There's no graphic violence in the book and no explicit sex, either - and, as I'd hoped, nobody's who's read the story up to now has even noticed

Click on Globe returns to contents

their absence. The new **HTD** is very definitely a "mature readers" book, but it's the *ideas* that make it so, not the sex, violence, or profanity.

(By the way, to be clear about this - I have no objection to those words or to writers who make use of them. They do, in fact, appear in later issues of **HTD**, in places where the usage seemed appropriate and natural. This small effort at redefining a "mature readers'" comic was simply intended to demonstrate that they aren't necessary.)

BL: If you're back with Howard, what happens to Leonard?
SG: Leonard the Duck and Rhonda Martini are alive and well and living in the Buffalo, New York of the Image universe... just in case things don't work out with Marvel.

BL: Six issues of **HTD** are planned for the Max line, then what? Does that decision lie wholly with Marvel or do outside influences have any say?
SG: Ultimately, it'll be Marvel's decision, of course, but I think everyone's hoping we can go beyond the initial six. Sales will likely be the determining factor. If the book can at least support itself in the comics shops, chances are we'll do more. (Personally, though, I think the larger audience for this character may be in bookstores and trade paperbacks.)

BL: There was a pretty poor movie made of Howard: there's also a school of thought that says the Turkeydom of the film actually did the character a favour in that it decreased the likelihood of there being a regular HTD series without your input, and thus maintained the character's dignity. Comments?
SG: This will probably sound a bit self-serving, but I think the real reason no serious effort was made to revive Howard over the years was that nobody else could write the damn character. A number of people tried, but somehow every attempt fell flat, as did the movie itself. I'm not even sure what it is, but there's something I understand about Howard that other writers don't.

It's funny - after having seen it done so poorly so many times over the years, I actually wondered myself whether I could still write the character. I was very apprehensive about that when I started work on this new series. As it turned out, I slipped into his voice and found the right tone for the stories almost immediately. I didn't have to analyze or intellectualize it at all. Once I started writing the stuff, the character was just... there. Right in that section of the brain where I'd left him twenty-five years ago.

BL: Brief biographical details, please: avoid specifics if you wish, but where were you born/raised?
SG: Born at 12:01 a.m. in St. Louis, Missouri on September 20th, 1947. Graduate of University City High School (a St. Louis suburb), class of 1965 and St. Louis University, class of 1969. My major in college was radio-TV-film with a minor in creative writing. I did a little graduate work but never finished my master's. After leaving school, I worked for a couple of years in radio and advertising before moving to New York in 1972 to take an associate editor's position at Marvel. I moved to Las Vegas in early 1977, and then later that year to Los Angeles, where I stayed until 1999. I'm now in Las Vegas again

and very happy to have escaped L.A. - but I'd really like to move back to New York.

*BL: Formative influences? Societal/literary/other? I recall you mentioned Albert Camus on an **HTD** letters page. Was the happy Algerian goalkeeper a big influence? (As an aside here: do you remember visiting Glasgow, Scotland, many years ago?)*
SG: Camus made a major impression on me when I was in college, yeah. Other influences are so many and varied I don't know where to begin. How do you put, say, Stanley Kubrick, George Carlin, John Lennon, the Marx Brothers, Joseph Heller, Will Eisner, Stan Lee, and Jack Kirby all in one list? (Although, I guess I just did.)

I'm one of those goddamn baby-boomers, so my societal influences were the same ones that everybody of my generation had to deal with - the Cold War, the civil rights movement, the Vietnam war, and so on.

I'm not sure how it relates to this question, but yes, I do remember visiting Glasgow. I was very taken with the place and especially with the people I met. (Special hellos to Frank Plowright and John McShane.) I'd really like to come back to the UK for a much longer visit sometime, maybe spend a year or two there.

BL: Why comics?
SG: Lately I've been asking myself that very question. Over and over.

BL: Music - what floats your boat, and why?
SG: Beatles, early Stones, early Dylan, Frank Zappa, the Fugs, Simon & Garfunkel, a lot of early rock and roll, early Motown and Stax/Volt soul, some jazz. My girlfriend has been trying to turn me on to more recent stuff, but I'm afraid I find a lot of it just noisy and not much fun. I'm kind of taken with the Jazz Butcher Conspiracy, though. *Mind Like a Playgroup* is the

Click on Globe returns to contents

kind of thing John Lennon might have written in an exceptionally weird moment, and I sometimes catch myself humming *The Devil Is My Friend*.

In general, I like music that has a playful quality to it, and stuff that makes me want to think as well as dance.

BL: Where's your head at?
SG: Up my ass, about half the time.

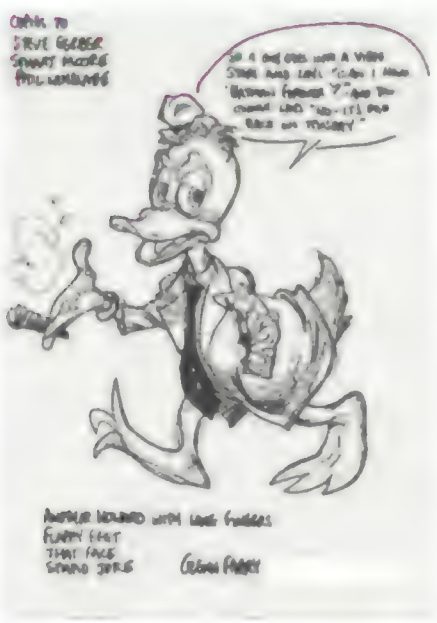
(My girlfriend says you and your readers would probably appreciate a more considered, less wise-ass response, so...)

I've been thinking a lot about the blindness that can be induced by nationalism and religion; about the relationship that exists among car flags, Jesus bumper stickers, Bush's approval rating, and the promise of 72 virgins in the afterlife.

I've also been thinking a lot about mortality and the concept of non-being. I've been doing some reading on the subject of relativity and superstring theory; for whatever reason, I have a desire to understand the current thinking on the structure of the universe.

So that's a more substantive answer. Please understand, though, it's taking every ounce of willpower not to add: "Oh, and I'm really into *Smallville*."

BL: Talking of heads: what's the fascination with heads and the replacement thereof with incongruous objects?
SG: I don't know. It's one of several motifs that seem to run through my work. There are others. Cat Yronwode once pointed out that I also have a thing about women in fishnet stockings. And then there are the various woman-and-creature pairings.



BL: My local comic store owner wants to know; what really happened to the elf?
SG: As far as I know, he was really run over by that truck. Other questions abound, however. Who was he? Where did he come from? Why was he shooting people seemingly at random? Is there another elf who wants to avenge his death or needs to complete his mysterious mission? I actually addressed that last question in **Spider-Man Team-Up #5**, but I've since deemed that story - which teamed Spidey with Howard the Duck - to be apocryphal.

Since I raised the issue, I may as well answer the logical next question. The Howard stories I consider to be "canonical" are **Adventure Into Fear #19** and **Man-Thing #1** (the two-part story that included Howard's first appearance), the short stories in **Giant-Size Man-Thing #4** and **#5**, **Howard The Duck #1-27** (the original color comics series), **Howard The Duck Annual #1**, and **Marvel Treasury Edition #12**. All the rest - including the couple of other duck stories I wrote myself - are apocryphal. Readers can choose to believe them or not, but I don't feel bound by them.

*BL: **Spider-Man Team-Up #5** is apocryphal? Aren't all comicbook stories apocryphal?*
SG: As is all fiction, of course. Comicbook stories, though, and especially those concerning company-owned characters, would seem to be hyper-apocryphal. As far as I know, nobody's yet attempted a "reboot" of **Moby Dick** or **Bleak House**.

*BL: There's been a recent revival of **The Defenders**, seemingly trying to emulate your take on the book. After about a year it's changing editorial format quite radically. Do you think modern mass-market comics can support a title that "steps outside" as much as your 70s/80s work did?*
SG: Absolutely. It just has to be the right book. I haven't seen the new **Defenders** stuff, but if your description of it is accurate, I can tell you immediately where it went awry - it shouldn't have been trying to "emulate" anything. Readers can always tell the difference between a calculated "direction" imposed on a series and what leaps off the page when a writer or artist is genuinely enjoying the act of creation.

I realize this may strain credulity, but I never deliberately set out to be "weird" with the original **Defenders** book. I was just writing stories that amused or intrigued me, on the assumption that if I found them entertaining, so would others. I know some people in comics would term that approach "self-indulgent," but what exactly would the alternatives be? Write stories I don't find interesting? That doesn't make any sense. If even I can't enjoy my own story, why would anybody else? Second-guess the readers' tastes and expectations? All you get that way are generic, homogenized, "focus group" comics. Some of those books succeed, sure, but just as many or more of them fail. So there's no real advantage to that kind of pandering; you just wind up with a despondent writer and the same 50-50 chance of commercial success. You might as well try something more inventive and original.

"...up my ass, about half the time."

*BL: We have somebody at Borderline (*ahem*) who believes quite strongly that **Howard The Duck #16** - the famous "roadtrip" issue - is a very important comicbook indeed. Should we have him taken away?*
SG: No, he's entitled to his opinion. I won't agree or disagree, though. I'm uncomfortable rendering that kind of judgment about my own work.

BL: Do you ever read a comic (or anything else) written by one of the younger writers around these days and think "That guy read my stuff"? (Joe Kelly comes to mind, as does Tom Peyer.)
SG: If I've encountered their work, I don't recall it. (Do they write mainly superhero titles? If so, that's the reason. I glance at those books occasionally, just to see what's going on, but it's been a very long time - years - since I've been able to read one from beginning to end. I typically get bored around page eight and set them aside.) In any event, I doubt many writers who are currently in their twenties or early thirties could have been influenced by my work. Most of it has been out of print since its initial publication, so they've probably never been exposed to it.

BL: What's the last movie you saw?

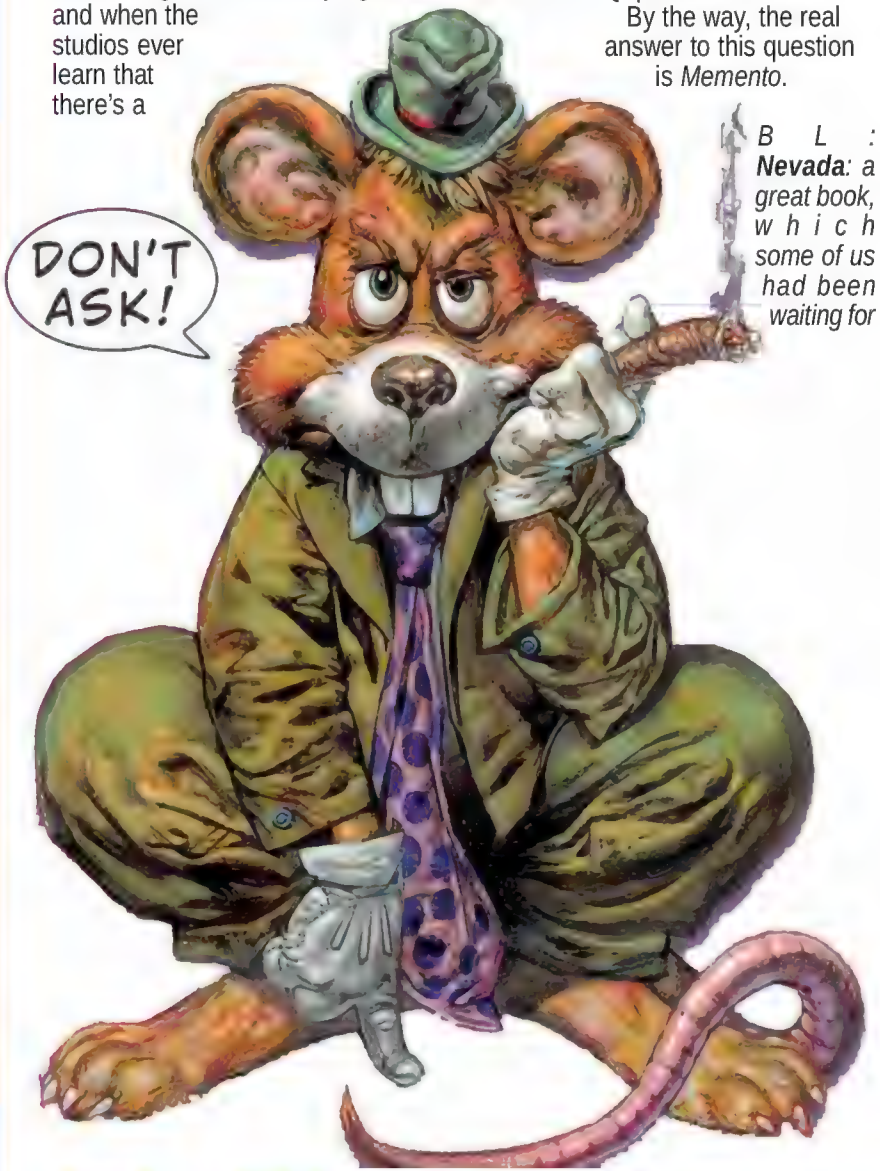
Click on Globe returns to contents

SG: *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (2001).

BL: What's the last movie you enjoyed?
SG: *Taxi Driver* (1976).

I'm exaggerating (a little) for comic effect, of course, but I've pretty much given up on movies as a source of anything but irritation. I'll start taking them seriously again if and when the studios ever learn that there's a difference between a story and a theme park ride. In the meantime, I urge everyone to stay away from the theatres. It may be hard to believe, given the current cultural obsession with movies, but your quality of life really won't be severely impaired if you skip most of this crap. You may even regain a little of your hearing and a few I.Q. points.

By the way, the real answer to this question is *Memento*.



*BL: **Nevada**: a great book, which some of us had been waiting for since Remarka Demonstrata first appeared. How did it do? Will we see that second series?*
SG: **Nevada** did okay - better than most Vertigo titles are selling now, actually - but unfortunately, it never really caught on the way we hoped it would. Which is a shame. Phil Winslade and I are both very proud of our work on that book, and I know Karen Berger was fond of it, too. If the new **HTD** series takes off, I'm hoping it'll pique readers' curiosity about what Phil and I have done previously; with any luck, they'll check out the **Nevada** trade paperback, which is still in print.

There probably won't be a second series from Vertigo, but I'd like to do something more with the character eventually.

BL: Did you find that the Marvel and Vertigo editing styles differed greatly? Little? Not at all? None of the above?
SG: It depends on which Marvel you mean - the Marvel of the 1970s or today. The way I work with Stuart Moore on the MAX version of **Howard The Duck** is very similar to the way Karen Berger and I worked on **Nevada**. I pretty much have free rein with the content, but Stuart has made some very valuable suggestions along the way, as did Karen with **Nevada**.

In the 70s, the system at Marvel was even looser than what I've just described. In those days, writers would often send plots or scripts directly to the artists, and only later, mostly as a formality, turn in a copy at Marvel when it was time to voucher the work. You have to remember that Marvel was publishing more than forty titles a month and had only one editor, Roy Thomas, at that time. Rather than try to micro-manage the books, Roy hired a group of writers whom he felt he could trust to act almost as de facto editors on their own books. As chaotic as that system may sound, it worked pretty well.

*BL: You've said in the past that you and Mary Skrenes have promised each other you won't reveal the planned ending of **Omega The Unknown**. We're not asking you to give it away, but do you think that ending may ever see the light of day?*
SG: I doubt it - unless Marvel decides they want to revive that book, too.

> *"...I don't read many comics at all these days..."*

*BL: **Void Indigo**: the synopses of the unpublished issues are on www.stevegerber.com , which we heartily recommend to everybody. Any chance of those issues being scripted/drawn/published?*
SG: Not unless I eventually find the means to publish them myself. Only one publisher I've spoken to would touch the series, and at present they don't have the financial means to see the project through. I'm tempted to supply you with a list of the publishers who've rejected it. They all have wonderful excuses, but what it really comes down to is that they're still - after what? fifteen years? - scared shitless of the furor the book caused the first time around.

*BL: **VI** was withdrawn because (according to the official version) it was too violent for that time. How would **VI** compare with the hyper-violent material being published today in books like, say, **The Authority**?*
SG: **VI** wasn't "withdrawn." It was literally boycotted out of existence by the distributors of the time. The first issue sold about 80,000 copies. The second issue, after distributors urged their retailers not to order it, sold about 14,000 copies. When we saw what had happened, Archie Goodwin (the editor of the book) and I decided it just wasn't worth continuing.

Void Indigo was probably a bit less violent than some of the material being published today, but it wasn't only the violence that got distributors so riled. There was also the sexual content, which, though not explicit, was intentionally very disturbing.

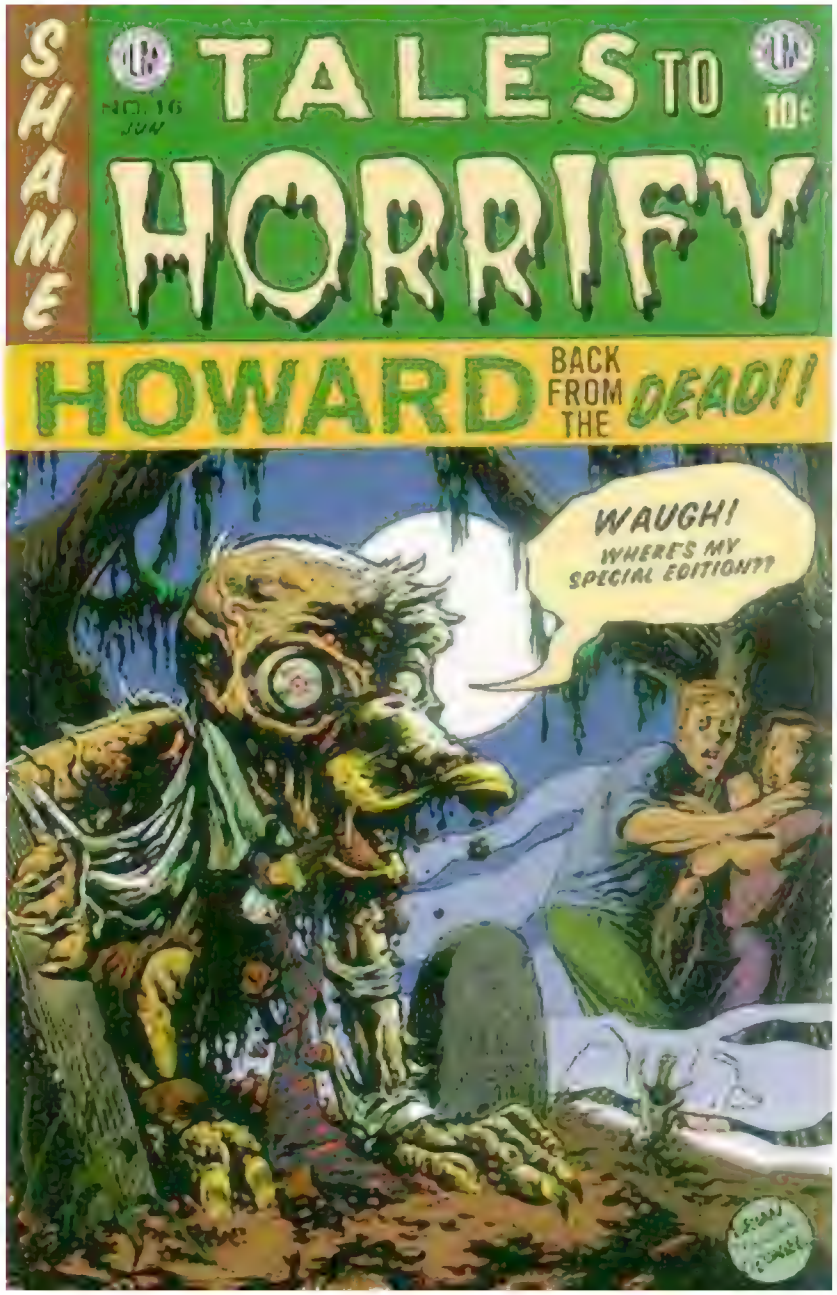
BL: Which leads to - what comics are you reading these days?
SG: I don't read many comics at all these days.

BL: And the last good book you read?
SG: How about the last four? There's a series of science fiction novels by Rudy Rucker - the titles are **Software**, **Wetware**, **Freeware**, and **Realware** - that together constitute one of the most bizarre, most imaginative, most deliciously warped stories I've ever read.

*BL: There's a **Howard The Duck Essentials** trade out: any chance of seeing other classic Gerber, such as **Man-Thing** or **The Defenders**?*
SG: Not that I know of. You'd have to ask Marvel.

BL: Does it bother you at all that much

Click on Globe returns to contents



of your work - much of comics, period - is seen for such a short time before becoming virtually unavailable? The trades and archives from Marvel and DC are going some way to redressing this, but are they enough?
SG: Yes, it bothers me a great deal, and while the various archive editions are a promising start, they're not enough. I'd love to see a lot of Golden and Silver Age material back in print, preferably in quality softcover editions, so they wouldn't have to cost an arm and a leg. This stuff should be readily available to readers who are curious about the history and evolution of comics. In fact, more of the current readership might be curious, if they could afford these books.

On a personal level, yes, it bothers me that readers don't have access to my own past work. Almost *none* of it is available. The only exceptions are **Nevada**, which Vertigo has kept in print in trade paperback, and now the **Hoaward The Duck Essentials** collection. At the very least, I'd like to see collections of my run on **Defenders** and **Man-Thing**, and a tpb of the **Foolkiller** series.

BL: You were upset when other writers in the mid 90s started writing stories featuring Howard The Duck without your approval. However, you'll be writing the comics adaptation of the second Blade movie. Did you ask Marv Wolfman's opinion before taking this assignment? Do you believe that the situations are similar, and if not, why?
SG: No, and Marv didn't ask mine before he agreed to write the Howard newspaper strip. That's why the two situations are different: I would never have done it first. I did have some qualms about taking this assignment, and, frankly, I was on Marv's side in the lawsuit; I really hoped he would win. I also believe, though, that actions must carry consequences, even if the consequences arrive twenty years later.

These are the consequences.

I would happily inflict the same on the other writers who did Howard stories, but most of them, unlike Marv, have never created anything that was worth a damn. Big surprise.

(Can I be a hardass, or what?)

"...I was Marv's side in the lawsuit; I really hoped he would win."

BL: Yes you can, and in equally hardass manner I have to ask regarding your differences with Marvel. You went into the company as an associate editor and later acted as an editor; surely when you held those positions you had some idea what the stance on ownership was?
SG: Fair question. The answer is: "not really."

Up until the mid-to-late 1970s, the level of understanding among creators regarding copyrights and trademarks lay somewhere on the spectrum between negligible and non-existent. You have to understand that an "associate editor" at Marvel in those days was essentially just a proof reader and, to a very limited extent, a copy editor. I wasn't handing out assignments or working with other writers or representing the company in any way. Later on, the only books I actually edited, apart from a few issues of **Crazy** Magazine, were those I was writing.

Let me tell you a story. When I got my very first "freelance" check from Marvel - that is, a check for a story I'd written, as opposed to staff work - there was a statement regarding rights and ownership stamped on the back of it. I wasn't sure exactly what it meant, but it troubled me, so I asked Roy Thomas, who was then editor of the company, about it. Roy just said, "Oh, that's on the back of all the checks." Or words to that effect. There was no further explanation. On about half the checks I received from Marvel after that point, whenever I happened to remember, I just marked an "X" through the statement when I endorsed the check for deposit. Marvel never balked, and the bank never refused to accept or cash the check. I had every reason to believe the back-of-the-check statement was a meaningless formality and nothing more.

It was only in the late 70s, just prior to the release of the first *Superman* movie, that the Siegel and Shuster story came horrifyingly to light, and it began to dawn on all of us that this stuff might actually be important. It took the better part of a decade *after* that before most writers and artists realized *how* important.

Today, the situation is entirely different. Partly as a result of the **Howard the Duck** lawsuit and others like it, writers and artists are much more aware of creators' rights issues. Too few, in my opinion, have been willing to take any serious stand on those issues, but they can't claim ignorance anymore, and, of course, neither can I.

BL: If you're still with us after that question; Todd McFarlane Productions. The first issue of ***Kiss: Psycho Circus*** *was solicited with you as writer. Before publication you announced you wouldn't be writing the book after all. Was there any reason for this you'd wish to talk about?*
SG: I'm surprised to hear that my name was in the solicitation, but

Click on Globe returns to contents

that's about the biggest surprise in the whole story. There's no **Miracleman** drama here.

I bowed out of the assignment very early on. I wanted some kind of equity in any characters that I would create for the series. Kiss wanted to own everything. We couldn't reach an agreement, so I passed on the job. For me, it was purely a business decision - no acrimony, no bitterness associated with it at all. My impression at the time was that Todd understood my decision, and I have no reason now to believe otherwise.

BL: Image Comics; you were there during the first years, working with Jim Lee and Marc Silvestri, and you were also a vocal defender of the company at that time on various online forums. How do you feel about Image now? What are your opinions about McFarlane's dealings with other creators, or about Jim Lee selling Wildstorm? What would you have liked Image to be?

SG: I wish Image - or any other company - were more of a factor in the market than they are today. They've mostly become another ho-hum publisher, churning out lots of books that don't look or read very differently from the standard Marvel or DC stuff. In the early 90s, they had the best chance of any new company in the last forty years to turn this industry totally upside-down and, for the most part, they blew it.

I never had any particular vision for Image's future. I never faulted them for the kind of books they were publishing, and in fact, I found some of the material interesting. (Erik Larsen's **Savage Dragon**, for example, was seriously underrated. It was a very bizarre and funny book.) What I hoped Image would become was a third 800-pound gorilla in the marketplace - a big, snarling, impolite beast that would jump up and down occasionally and rattle Marvel and DC out of their complacency. The Image guys did manage to induce a minor panic for a year or so, for which they should be congratulated, but the follow-through just wasn't there.

"...I certainly wouldn't write it off as Mark Alessi's personal Jonestown just yet."

I don't have any firsthand knowledge of Todd's dealings with other creators. When the stories about **Miracleman** and **Angela** first broke, I was shocked. Todd and I are just acquaintances; I don't know him well at all, but it was almost impossible to reconcile that kind of behavior with the person I'd met and spoken to. Apparently, though, the stories are true. I certainly can't imagine Neil Gaiman concocting any of this nonsense. How do I feel about it? It's disgusting that Neil has to deal with this crap, and it's sad to see a firebrand like Todd transform himself into a caricature of the typical tight-fisted comic book publisher.

I don't know all the details of DC's acquisition of Wildstorm, either, but it seems to have worked out well enough for the two parties. If nothing else, it assured that Alan Moore's ABC imprint would get very good promotion and distribution. I'm somewhat disappointed that Wildstorm seems to have adopted DC's "nothing new" approach for their own titles, though. At this point, **WILDC.A.T.S.** has been through almost as many revamps, revisions, and re-launches as the typical sixty year old DC book. It'd be refreshing to see them try something altogether new and different.

BL: Do you think that a similar "breakaway republic" of creators may happen within the comics industry in the near future? Or will there be more "company towns" like CrossGen?

SG: Not in the near future, no. What made it possible for Image, ironically, was the royalty money the founders earned on their books for Marvel. Comics aren't generating royalties of that magnitude anymore. Only a handful of creators are earning any royalties at all, in fact, so writers and artists are pretty much back where they were in the pre-Image days - working as page-rate slaves, servicing company-owned trademarks.

CrossGen is an interesting experiment. I have no idea how well it's ultimately going to work, but I certainly wouldn't write it off as Mark Alessi's personal Jonestown just yet. The structure is basically the same as an animation studio, and while I don't think that's the ideal model for generating creative breakthroughs, it does have certain advantages in terms of consistency and quality control. Also, I've spoken at length

to Tony Panaccio, who heads up the marketing operations at CrossGen, and the company does have some interesting and innovative ideas about how and where to sell comics and licensed products. My impression is that they're giving a lot more thought to those questions than either DC or Marvel.

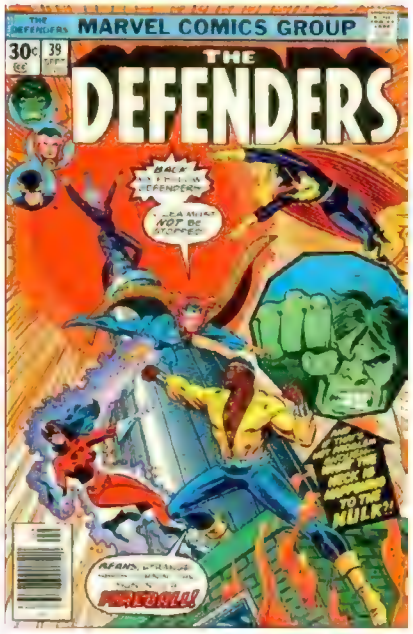
On the other hand, I think CrossGen will, over time, have to loosen up its structure just a little. Even the animation studios where I've been employed don't require that writers perform their work entirely on the premises - in the same city, usually, yes, but not within the same four walls. The CrossGen books I've read so far aren't all terrible, but there is an oddly "distracted" quality about the writing, as if the writers' concentration were being disrupted by the office environment. There are awkward transitions, too many imprecise word choices, dialogue that isn't as sharp as it should be. This may be something only another

Click on Globe returns to contents

writer would notice, but I don't think I'm imagining it.

BL: What's coming up? New projects? Future projects? More work outside of comics? (We haven't covered your animation work here as this is for a comics magazine, but if you'd like to...)
SG: Right now, I'm co-writing (with Steff Osborne) a new graphic novel to be published by Larry Young's company, AiT/PlanetLar. I'm developing some other new ideas for comics. And I'm also doing a bit of animation work - writing English dialogue for a Japanese-produced series called *Yu-Gi-Oh*. Oh, and sometime in 2002, you'll see the third installment of **Last Son Of Earth**, a Superman *Elseworlds* story for DC. The script is finished; artist Doug Wheatley is working on it now.

BL: Larry Young's getting lots of good word for what he's doing with AiT/PL (and rightly so); what would



you say were the main advantages - if any - of working with a smaller company like his?
SG: The book we're doing for Larry is an idea I've had in the back of my head for, oh, at least twenty years. I've proposed it to other publishers, but the only response I got from them was a real or metaphorical - over the phone - blank stare. None of them "got" it. Larry did. Immediately. A publisher who can visualize and think creatively is a tremendous advantage.

Another *major* advantage with a publisher like Larry is that his main focus isn't on promoting company-owned books and characters, as it always will be with Marvel or DC. Marvel isn't publishing *any* creator-owned material at the moment, and at DC those books invariably take a back seat when it comes to promotion and publicity. Some creator-owned projects attract attention and find an audience on their own, of course, but look at the effort and money expended on promoting **Dark Knight 2**, for example, as compared to what was spent on **Preacher** or **Transmetropolitan**. Larry may not have the resources DC does, but if those resources aren't going to be made available to a book, what difference does it make? Larry believes in what he publishes and promotes it accordingly.

BL: He concentrates on publishing graphic novels and collections rather than the traditional pamphlet - is this the future of print-format comics?
SG: Graphic novels and trade paperback collections are unquestionably the future of printed comics. The 32 page pamphlet is a relic, both commercially and creatively. You can't sell it anywhere other than comic book stores, the ratio of cover price to pages of content has become ludicrous, and the unnatural restrictions the format imposes on the flow of narrative - the necessity of breaking every story into segments of exactly 22 pages - are just too limiting.

"...we've gotten past the dot-com hysteria phase."

BL: You say on your website that you consider the possible synergy between comics and the net to be "the most exciting evolutionary leap in comics since that kid blasted off from Krypton in 1938". Could you expand on that? Where do you see the tech and the creativity heading?
SG: Now that we've gotten past the dot-com hysteria phase, I'm hoping creators and publishers will make a hard, pragmatic, and forward-looking assessment of what the Internet means for comics.

Its most immediate application, of course, has to do with promotion, sales, and distribution of printed comics. There are a number of comics retailers online, but for the most part they've made no serious effort to reach beyond the extant audience for comics, the people who already patronize the shops. The major publishers haven't done much in that regard, either. Other than television, which remains prohibitively expensive, the Internet is the most wide-ranging medium available for generating and enhancing the general public's awareness of comics, and yet it's barely being put to use at all. It's ridiculous, for example, that someone who reads an article on **Dark Knight 2** in *Entertainment Weekly's* online edition can't immediately surf to a DC website and order the book with a couple of clicks. (DC wouldn't even have to fulfil the orders themselves; they could partner with Amazon.com, which, fortunately, does carry the book.)

More controversial is the net's potential role as a delivery system for original content, bypassing printing presses and comic book shops altogether. Many people in comics are highly skeptical that this could ever come about. Others worry that if it does happen, printed comics will be supplanted by what they consider an inferior form. Still others feel that net comics are a dead issue, that they've already failed. And then there's the group that's just paranoid about dealing with the technology at all.

There are also people, and I'm one of them, who believe that net comics haven't even been given a serious trial yet. There've been a lot of low-budget experiments and a number of expensive failures, yes, but I don't think anyone would argue that the content offered so far compares favorably to the best of printed comics. We've yet to see what happens when someone creates truly compelling work, uses the technology in an interesting and original way to enhance it, promotes it effectively, and distributes it over the net. It will happen, though. It's only a matter of time.

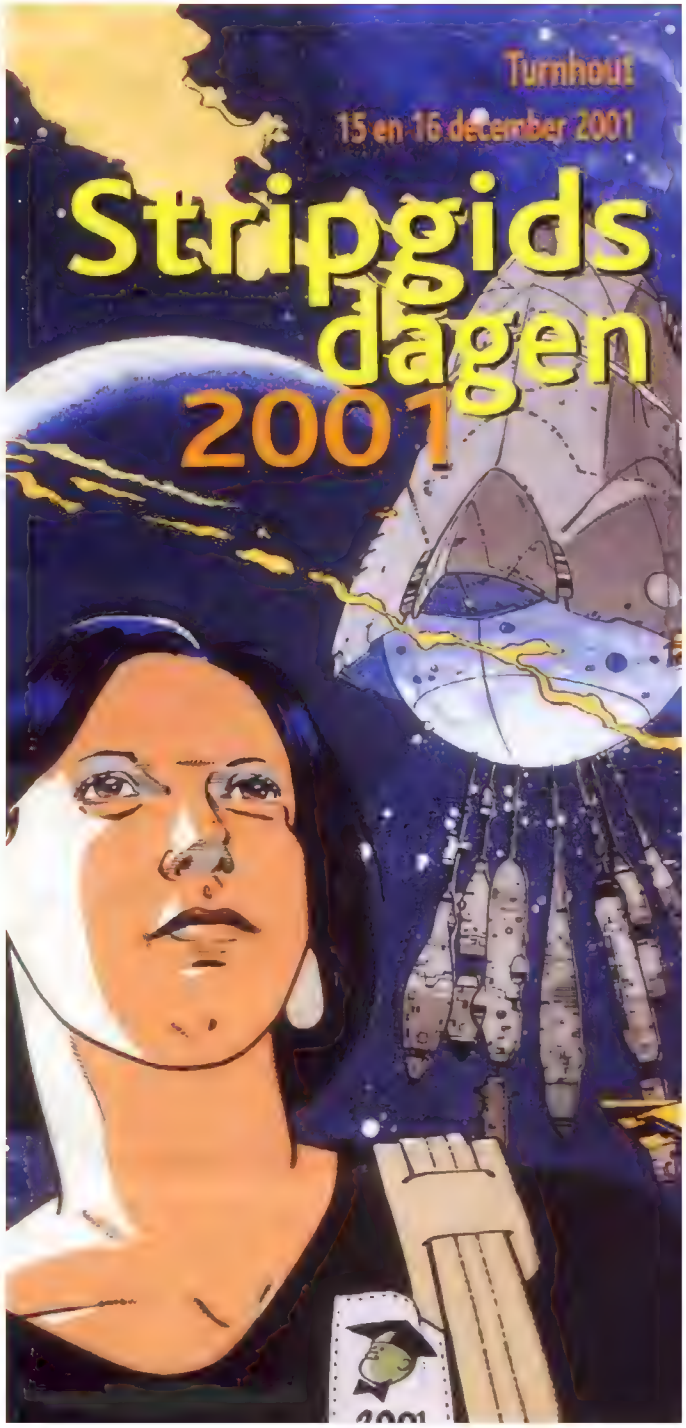
To be honest, I'm not sure where the technology is headed at this point. Macromedia's Flash program offered some interesting possibilities for comics, but it seems to have fallen somewhat out of favor. Flash files tend to chew up bandwidth, and nobody wants to spend twenty minutes downloading a comic that can be read in three. As the economy recovers and investment in the net - and development of programs and content for it - picks up, we'll probably see some interesting innovations. (God, I sound as airy and vague as a defunct dot-com executive.)

BL: I have in my hand, right now, a "Get Down America! Vote Howard The Duck in '76!" badge. Do you still have any? If not, would you like this one?
SG: I appreciate the thought, but I do still have a few.

BL: And finally; your message to future generations?
SG: Try anyway.

***Howard The Duck #1** is on sale this month, as is **The Essential Howard The Duck** trade paperback. More of Steve Gerber can found at www.stevegerber.com*

BL



Building a future for Flemish comics

Mike Kidson braved near arctic conditions to attend one of Belgium's key comics event...

*WHEN Anglophone readers refer to "Franco-Belgian" comics they generally mean about comics written and published in French: **Spirou**, for example, or **Tintin** or **Blake et Mortimer**. However, the part of Belgium called Flanders has a very strongly characterised and popular Dutch-language comics scene, with a large number of long running series. One of the key events in this community's calendar is the biannual Stripgidsdagen festival, held in the small town of Turnhout. Last month I attended my fourth consecutive Stripgidsdagen... what follows is a "roving eye" report, an outsider's view of changes that appear to be occurring in both Flemish comics and their principal festival.*

Friday December 14

Arrived at Turnhout early in the evening and headed straight for the festival's venue, De Warande cultural centre. In 1995 and 1997 Friday evening had been given over to the formal opening of massive exhibitions dedicated to the work of artists - in 1997 an exhibition based on Tardi's **C'était la guerre des tranchées** took the visitor through a virtual reconstruction of World War 1 trenches - but in the last two years such exhibitions have been replaced by displays of more general interest, and the formal opening has given way to informal drinks and chat between members of the organising group, dealers and foreign visitors.

Present at various point this evening were Patrick Van Gompel, Peter Van Laarhoven and Ad Hendrickx of the Bronzen Adhemar Stichting - BAS, the fan society which runs the festival, named for a Turnhout statue of a character in Marc Sleen's series **Nero** - a number of helpers and a small stream of foreign visitors. Having settled down with the first of several glasses of Hoegaarden "wit" beer, I asked Patrick how things were looking so far; as the organisation's press man he was happy to report that national news and TV coverage had been underway and that a live TV crew was expected at some point during the weekend.

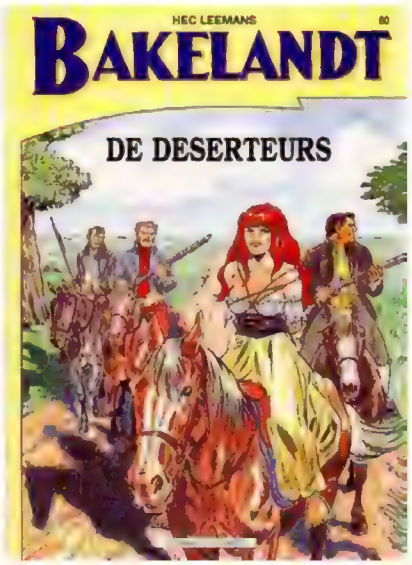
As the organisers moved around checking things, general conversation carried on between myself, Norwegian artist Jason (self-publisher of **Miau Miau**, whose book length **Vent Litt**, translated as **Hey, Wait** by Fantagraphics came in 2nd in **Time** magazine's top 10 comics of 2001), Dutch small press creator Jan Hofstra and, from Denmark, Ole Comoll Christensen. Ole has pursued mainstream and small press careers simultaneously, winning Denmark's most prestigious comics award, the Ping, for his clear line work on the Carlsen series **Dimensionsdetectiven** and inking backgrounds on DC's **Starman** for his studio colleague Peter Snejbjerg while putting out a collection of short b&w strips, **Excreta**, through Slab-O-Concrete and contributing to the Dutch magazine **Zone 5300** and the Slovenian **Stripburger**.

In the company of these and a pool of hospitable helpers the evening passed pleasantly and increasingly hazily until it was time to head for the hotel and hit the hay. (Couldn't sleep. Too much beer and stimulating conversation, not enough food.)

Saturday December 15 Left the hotel with Ole, took a diversion via a cash machoine and a remainder bookshop (oh look, albums at a pound each – not so hot a price, but I was getting into buying mode and a couple of Martin Lodewijk's **Agent 327** albums said "Buy me" very loudly). Saturday morning at the Stripgidsdagen is the time for settling in, seeing what's to be seen - and buying comics! Around 10 am we arrived back at the attractive and surprisingly labyrinthine De Warande and I soon had my nose deep in the dealers' boxes of secondhand albums. The main Flemish series are, apart from occasional glitches usually caused by the need to colour albums originally produced in b&w, kept constantly in print, so the secondhand market tends to focus on special issues and older rarities, but there's still a market for cheap, ordinary used issues and I was happy to be able to locate, at a price of about £1-£1.50 each, several of the albums needed to complete my run of **Bakelandt**.

A first round of purchases made and dropped back at the hotel, I returned to take a closer look at the festival overall. On my first visit in 1995 small press had been a new component, and the BAS had supported it by funding publication of a massive, now legendary international small press anthology, **Formaline** – but even so the few small press attendees had occupied a cramped space in the centre's basement, and most visitors, there for the mainstream, had viewed their comics as something a little alien. In 2001, the view was very different; Ria Schulpen's Bries tables were generally crowded with customers, the **Zone 5300** table was doing brisk business whenever I passed by, Dutch artists Maaike Hartjes and Marc

Click on Globe returns to contents



Bakelandt

HEC Leemans' historical series, set in the Napoleonic era and recounting the (fictional) adventures of the (real life) brigand Ludovicus Bakelandt, is in many ways typical of the traditional Flemish mainstream as established during the late 1940s by Willy Vandersteen (**Suske en Wiske**) and Marc Sleen (**Nero**).

Story continuity between the eighty-two albums to date is of minor importance compared with the interplay of the series' main characters, who constitute a variation on that classic basis of the Flemish strip, the family. They do not develop, instead remaining fixed types, each expressing a consistent nature which may represent an aspect of the Flemish people: the cunning, fundamentally honourable Bakelandt, the tough, fiery yet compassionate Rooie Zita, the tough yet emotional Pe Bruneel and their primary antagonists, the irredeemably vicious French commandant De Crevecoeur and his brutish aide Cudell.

The stories within which these types interact are thoroughly historically researched, presenting a panoramic view of the Flemish people's struggle for identity amidst the struggle between the Napoleonic French regime and the earlier Austrian one ousted by Bonaparte. Rather harder to pinpoint is what may well be the guiding spirit of the series – an assertion of the generous, often placid yet tough, forthright and funloving Flemish national character.

In short, the series is, I think, largely about what it means to be Flemish – and that is the hallmark of the tradition Flemish comics mainstream. It is also simple, clear, finely crafted and entirely unpretentious; a genuinely popular comic intended for the enjoyment of the general populace (who can follow each album's original serialisation in the daily *Het Laatste Nieuws*) and not just for comics fans. But it could even be argued that to be Flemish is to be a reader, or at least aware, of comics, so strongly does the comics mainstream assert the national cultural identity.

Hendrix had come to sign, not to sell and the small press and mainstream tables were all mixed together, sharing apparently equal status and attracting almost equal interest.

Another sign of change was apparent in the exhibition devoted to original art by Marvano (Mark Van Oppen). In the summer before each Stripgidsdagen a jury of BAS members and prominent artists elects an artist to be the laureate, and recipient of the Bronzen Adhemar award, at the next festival. Marvano was the 2001 laureate, selected among other reasons for having introduced American stylings into Flemish comics. He has notably collaborated with the US science fiction author Joe Haldeman, first on a three part adaptation of Haldeman's Hugo-winning novel **The Forever War** and more recently on an ongoing series of SF albums, **Dallas Barr**. In fact, his artwork is not notably similar in style to any in mainstream American comics; instead, it seems to me to be part of a school of bright, open, realistic art which is to be seen in Franco-Belgian series set in contemporary America, for instance in Vance & Van Hamme's **XIII** and Vranken & Desberg's **IR$**. But that is irrelevant to the signifiance of Marvano's election this year – which is that the Flemish mainstream has chosen to celebrate an artist who is bringing to it new styles and fresh approaches.

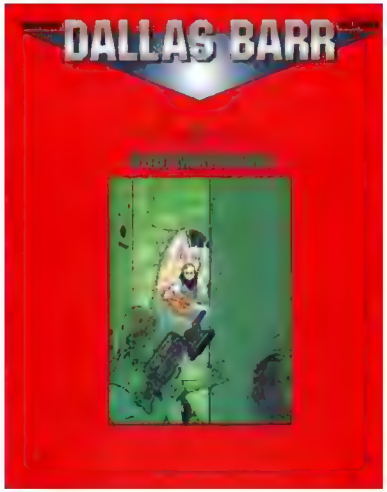
Saturday December 15 – Afternoon

One of the themes planned for the 2001 event had concerned music, the original idea being to reflect the links between artistic and musical creativity by having a number of artists performing. The centrepiece of this would have been a visit and performance by Robert Crumb and his band, as reported in **Borderline #1**, but Crumb had to pull out sue to injury to one of his band, and the music theme dwindled to a small display of Crumb's record sleeve art in a nearby

Dallas Barr

HALDEMAN and Marvano's original SF series is set in a late 21st century society where immortality is available to those who can afford a process which costs a million pounds a time and must be renewed every ten years. The depiction of the future is in most respects an extrapolation of present day society, driven by more sophisticated technology but otherwise fairly recognisable – which allows Marvano to use a lush realistic style and bright colour palette which implies visually that this is not an unpleasant or undesirable future. This fits with the depiction of America in a number of other recent Franco-Belgian comics; whereas American comics tend to depict a society which has lost innocence and is in decline, to a number of European creators America is something to be shown as an exotic, enticing wonderland.

As a narrative it's basically a thriller. Barr, a Chaykin-esque rakish and sarcastic adventurer needing to raise the readies for his rejuvenation treatments, is steered through seemingly straightforward adventures which turn out to have labyrinthine twists. He's always able to solve them: although he is hardly a conventional hero in manner, his strategies and reactions follow the standard heroic pattern. Marvano draws all this in an airy, engaging fashion, using lots of light and space, sometimes slipping over into eye candy but generally maintaining the flow and coherence of what is really a lightweight modern SF pulp. There's little to **Dallas Barr** which would be new to Anglophone readers; but, as already mentioned, its significance in the context of the Stripgidsdagen may be that the award given to it reflects an increasing acceptance of newer art styles and American themes by Flemish mainstream.



Click on Globe returns to contents

café, a few afternoon performances in De Warande's basement café by the Zone 5300 crew and other small pressers, and a brief musical interlude during the evening's award ceremony. Having been request to take a saxophone along with me, I duly abandoned my "roving onlooker" role for the afternoon and got into some blowing instead!

Consequently I largely missed the afternoon's signing sessions, a central part of the Stripgidsdagen: comics lovers of all ages queue patiently to get albums signed and sketched in (the sketching being standard practice, not something which is requested and paid for). However, I did note another sign of change; unlike in past years, small press, independent and mainstream artists signed side by side, and those independent artists whose work has been published in Dutch – notably David B. of the French indie group L'Association – attracted considerably queues.

Somewhere in there I also missed the arrival of the first American guests ever to set up at the Stripgidsdagen – a group from Drawn & Quarterly consisting of Chris Oliveiros, Seth and James Sturm. They appeared to be doing healthy business selling and signing copies of **The Revival**, **Palookaville**, Jason Lutes' **Berlin** tpb and other goodies. And, once more, I noted how books which might have been treated as something alien and of no interest just 6 years ago were attracting attention... rather than imposing a new openness to alternatives on the Flemish fans, it does look as though the festival is following and encouraging a trend.

By about 5.30pm the public were leaving and it was time to get down to the serious business of consuming that fine Belgian beer in preparation for the events of the evening (which, as it happens, would also involve consuming that fine Belgian beer...). This was undertaken in the company of **Bakelandt** and **F.C. De Kampioenen** artist, Zappa fan and nice guy Hec Leemans (yes, there'll be a **Borderline** interview forthoming) and his splendid wife Marie Jeanne. Suitably refreshed, we then made our way down the road to dinner in the attic of the De Weerelt restaurant, a splendid timber-roofed hall where excellent food was efficiently provided for 100 or so festival guests, wine waiters made sure that no-one was left with an empty glass, and pencils and pads were placed on the tables so that anyone who felt like sketching was suitably equipped. I suspect that one of the waitresses in particular was sketched by quite a few diners...

Well-fed and satisfied, the party then headed back to De Warande for the evening's speeches and award ceremony, the closest the festival comes to a formal event. Together with several hundred other interested people we were welcomed into De Warande's main auditorium by a number of individuals dressed as well known Belgian comics characters, applauded Marvano, and listened intently to the speech given by the Flemish Minister of Culture, Bert Anciaux. Mr. Anciaux had also been present in 1999: this time he was pressed as to what plans the government had with regard to comics, and responded that as of 2002 comics would for the first time be included as a category in the state-sponsored Vlaamse Gemeenschapsprijs, alongside the usual categories such as theatre, poetry, literature and so forth. In effect, he was promising state recognition of comics as one of the fine arts. Yet again, it's clear that change is in the air in Flanders – in this instance, perhaps a long overdue change for an industry which has enormous cultural importance yet has remained, as in other countries, a purely commercial enterprise.

(Mr. Anciaux may have wondered why, just prior to his speech, he was being serenaded with a Zappa song about France by two Belgian musicians and a hastily roped-in, slightly inebriated English saxophonist. I must confess I'm still wondering about it myself... but maybe guitarist Willy Geets's comment that we were showing the Minister of Culture some culture will do!)

The presentation was, as usual, followed by the serving of free beer from an improvised bar outside the auditorium. This year so many people attended that the bar first ran out of light beer then hoisted a price list and started charging! Oddly enough, that had the effect of clearing the place... The festival guests then headed, by twos and threes, back to De Weerelt, where provision for a late night drink and talk session, with free beer had been made. Sadly, the cellar venue was fine as a bar but inappropriately designed for conversation in anything other than very small groups: the wide-ranging discussions around grouped tables of previous years couldn't get started, the constant circulation of more beer placed the emphasis on more and more drinking... and by about midnight I'd reached my limit and weaved my way cheerfully through the frosty night back to the hotel.

Sunday December 15

One great thing about Belgian beer is that it's very clean and leaves no hangover, so I was up not only early next morning but bright as well! Saturday at the Stripgidsdagen tends to focus slightly more on he fans and serious collectors, Sunday is more the day when the general public and the TV crews flock in, so De Warande was already getting crowded by the time I reached it. My main priorities for the morning were to look at this year's main exhibition and pick up some small press books.

The exhibition, devoted to **Zonneland**, a venerable children's weekly started in the abbey of Averbode in 1920 and published from there until the 1960s, was a slight disappointment. Not that there was anything wrong with it – as usual with Stripgidsdagen exhibitions it was an enormous, elaborate and impeccably constructed affair, leading the visitor through a maze of walkways and unexpected nooks in the upper reaches of the cultural centre and offering surprises around very corner – a mock-up of a typical 1960s Flemish living room, for instance, or one of the editor's study... and I'm not sure what the motorbike was about! However, **Zonneland** itself, while probably of great interest to Flemish visitors as a slice of nostalgia, doesn't appear to have been of enormous interest as a comic; like the famous British weekly **Eagle** it unsurprisingly embodied a very strong Christian message which appears to have been of more importance than running powerful stories by excellent artists. At least **Eagle** had Frank Hampson; **Zonneland**'s prolific Gray Croucher seems to have been competent at producing simple, attractive-looking pages, but little more than that. Still, some early work by current **Spirou** contributors Jean-Pol (**Sammy**) and Jan Bosschaert (**Sam**, no relation!), especially a room full of fine original cover paintings by the latter, were diverting.

It was time to hit the small press tables. Keep an eye on the small

Zone 5300

This is a long running anthology title from The Netherlands which in recent years has moved from pamphlet format to magazine size and upped its production standards considerably; one black and white, it is now in full, lush colour. In somewhat the manner of the former British magazine **Deadline** it mixes some coverage of books and music with the strips - but the strips constitute a much more experimental, innovative body of work than the irreverent games with genre themes which characterised **Deadline**. It's a fine looking magazine, a heartening demonstration of the possibility of extreme experimentation in professional print for those who may wonder if photocopying will always be their only resort.

Click on Globe returns to contents

De Strip van 7

The album entitled **Het Geheim van de Kousenband** (The Secret of the Garter) was apparently dreamed up by two artists and a representative of the publisher Uitgeverij Standaard whilst travelling to the Angoulême Festival last year. It's very much a commercial stunt, a "jam" comic in which the artists and writers of 7 of Standaard's most popular series contributed several pages featuring their characters to an overall plotline, then got together and jammed on the final pages. The idea is that regular readers of each strip will buy the album and perhaps be stimulated to try out one or more of the other series... and with 93,000 copies sold in the first three weeks after publication, there's probably a good chance that it'll work.

However, perhaps against the odds it's an enjoyable read as well. The plot, written by Flemish TV comdian and singer Urbanus, is straightforward and predictable – a mysterious garter with a curse on it is passed from hand to hand (series to series), causing all kinds of disasters – which allows each artistic team to integrate it into their regular style of characterisation while segueing neatly from one disparate art style (ranging from the punkish expressionism of **Biebel** to the classic "clear line" of **Suske en Wiske**) to another. Most of them take it as an opportunity to send up their characters as well – Karel Biddeloo looks to have had a great time turning his usually straight-faced mediaeval strip **De Rode Ridder** (The Red Knight) into a burlesque of itself.

For the record, the other creators involved are Marc Sleen and Dirk Stallaert (**Nero**), Merho (Robert Merhottein, **Kiekeboe**), Paul Geerts (**Suske en Wiske**), Marc Legendre (7**Biebel**) and Willy Linthout & Urbanus (**Urbanus**). In the brief, hectic afternoon session at the Stripgidsdagen, the assembled group managed to get 600 copies signed.

press reviews in future issues of **Borderline** to find out more of what I picked up: for now I'll mention **Krautsalat**, a fine compilation of Danish work published by the sadly defunct German outfit Jochen Enterprises, and **Zone 5300**.

And suddenly it was lunchtime! Not that I'd noticed, not being much of a lunch person – but Peter Van Laarhoven materialised and invited me out for a small lunch in a town centre café, one of the many local promoting the festival (although the main sponsorship is provided by national firms such as Opel Belgium and Flemish bus company De Lijn). Slightly to my surprise, the lunch party consisted of myself, Peter and the three key members and founders of L'Association – Jean-Christophe Menu, David B. and Killofer. If you haven't heard of L'Asso than you haven't been watching developments in France during the last few years (or buying the enormous hardback collection of wordless comics, **Comics 2000**, which they published two years ago); the group has succeeded in creating a highly effective alternative publishing organisation, winning awards for their work all over Europe. Unfortunately, what could have been a highly interesting affair was hobbled by my linguistic limitations – while I'm perfectly able to read French, when it comes to conversation in the language I'm a mute, which forced everyone else to attempt English. But perhaps it made no difference, since no-one was keen to talk comics anyway. Menu turned out to share a taste for Fred Frith, Naked City and other avant-rock outfits with Peter and I, so the talk turned mostly to music, peppered with jokes (or not!) about Plastic Bertrand and Michel Legrand. The atmosphere was pleasant, the deliberately home-like atmosphere of the café was relaxing, the lasagna was excellent... I think a good time was had by all.

Sunday December 16 - Afternoon

Back at De Warande, a couple of old friends had arrived – Stig Olsen, affable Danish comics fanatic and multi-lingual translator, and my old Internet buddy Costas Paximadas, who'd flown in all the way from Greece. In the ensuing exchange of greetings, gifts, cups of coffee and conversation I repeated my Saturday stunt of missing the big event of the afternoon – the group signing session for the recent **De Strip van 7** project. Not that I'd have been queuing up for signatures anyway, especially given the absolutely enormous length of the queues... But I can at least explain what the project is about.

By this time the festival was winding down – time to go rushing around the stalls again looking for last minute bargains! Costas is completely unfamiliar with Dutch so he wasn't buying any comics, but he happily picked up a number of "ex libris" plates featuring some of his favourite comics characters. The "ex libris" plate is as close as Belgium gets to the US-style limited edition alternate cover business; artists occasionally produce a limited edition print which is enclosed with their latest album in selected shops, which then benefit from the custom of collectors. There's also a strong secondhand market for the prints.

Stig and Costas headed back to Brussels, I walked around as the last dealers stripped their tables down and the clearing up commenced. Encountering Patrick van Gompel again, I asked him how he felt about the course of the weekend. He seemed to be a happy man, pleased with attendance and press coverage and happy that the Minister had made something like a firm statement about government support for the medium. Smiling, he waved an arm expansively around and said "We are building a future for comics!"

Afterword

Is he right? Looking back over the last four Stripgidsdagen events, my impression is that he is. The scope of the festival has expanded enormously since 1995, shifting from a primarily local focus to one which welcomes foreign ideas and all kinds of alternatives, with the long term aim of enriching and transforming the mainstream. The Flemish comics culture might seem like a picture of health to those of us accustomed to the frequent doom, gloom and awareness of falling sales experienced by Anglophone fans, but even in Flanders sales have been falling, and younger people have been turning away from comics. A lot of fuss is being made in the UK and the USA about Marvel's efforts to turn the industry around – but is it really doing much more than tempting the current readership with more of the same in bright new wrappings? In Flanders it appears that they're doing more than that: they're looking not to revive the industry but to renew it. And it was good to see such a positive, forward-looking attitude in practice.

BL

Click on Globe returns to contents

TALES OF THE O MEN

*When copies of the first issue of an A5 photocopied comic named **The O Men** landed on the doormats of numerous self-publishers, APA members and small press reviewers in 1998, they didn't create much of a ripple effect. The British small press generates a lot of superhero comics, many of which don't really stand up to comparison with the professional ones, and there was no reason to assume that this one would be much different. But creator Martin Eden kept at it, a core group of readers and reviewers began to appreciate that there was something special about his book, it was nominated in the Eagle awards for both 2000 and 2001... and now **Borderline**'s Kelvin Green brings you more information about the British small press's latest hit!*

BORDERLINE: Tell us a bit about yourself.
Martin Eden: I'm a 27 year old Brummie, living in London at the moment. My day job is magazine editor – I edit the *X-Files* and *Farscape* magazines, and I also work on *Buffy* and *Simpsons* magazines. It's cool, cos I love all those shows.

I've been drawing since I could hold a pencil and I started doing some small press work about 5 years ago in comics like **Bulldog**, **The Bukowski Zine** and **Contact**. 3 years ago, I thought I'd have a stab at doing my own comic, and here we are!

*BL: Tell us a little about **The O Men**. What's it about?*
ME: It's a superhero soap opera. An ex-superhero called Doctor O finds out that an old enemy called Anathema is returning from the dead, so he tries to gather various superhuman acquaintances to help fight her. Problem is, they don't want to.

Volume One is basically about Anathema causing absolute havoc, killing superheroes left, right and centre, while also delving into the lives and motivations of the various characters who are trying to stop her (or not trying, as the case may be). The comic shows sides of superheroes that you don't really get to see in mainstream comics. It explores the various problems and secrets that the characters have, and examines what it would really be like to have weird powers. There's telepathic Grace (Magenta) who's having major problems with her hubby Stu (Debris), Colin (Brainstorm) who learns he is HIV positive, Miss Scarlet who's a loose cannon and generally causes havoc, feral Rob who is trying to be the leader. And there are loads of peripheral characters too. It's basically full of mysteries, shocks and surprises with plenty of horror, comedy and drama. One of the major themes and mysteries is the reason why it's called "The O Men" – there's more than one reason.

*BL: Where did **The O Men** come from? Why are you doing this?*
ME: I've always messed around writing and drawing superhero comics right from when I was a little kid. I think it's safe to say that **The O Men** has come from right back then. Even when I was doing a comic called "The Space Scouts" when I was 9, or "The Wonder Men" when I was 12, the O Men characters were all there in some form or another.

Why am I doing this? I've got tons of really cool ideas and I think some of them have never appeared in comics before. I wouldn't be putting **The O Men** out if I didn't think it was something different, and something which people would get a kick out of. I just want to entertain and surprise people.

BL: Where do your characters come from? Are they based on people you know, other characters, etc?
ME: Well, as I said above, the characters have been with me for ages in different forms - God knows where they came from in the first place. My comics have always had the married couple (Grace and Stu), the leader (Rob), the fun character (Miss S), the mysterious character (Doctor O), etc. So they're not really based on anyone, they've evolved over the years. Occasionally I'll sneak people I know into the background of the comic, although they don't always fare too well. My dad became a security guard in issue 6 (he got knocked unconscious), my workmates were "mindless thugs" in issue 5 (all knocked unconscious by Grace) and someone that really pissed me off ended up as a corpse (stabbed to death) in issue 1... Even I made an appearance in issue 11 (on the underground platform, looking at Anathema). Friends have requested that they appear in **The O Men**, but I always make it clear to them that it might not be the most pleasant experience.

BL: You've got a large cast of characters in *The O Men*, and although you're devoting an equal amount of "screen time" to each of them, the femme fatale Miss Scarlet is emerging as a favourite with readers. Why do you think this is? Is it a deliberate move on your part?
ME: I think Miss S stands out just because she's so much fun. We don't really know much about her or her past, so all she's got going for her is her personality. A bit like

Click on Globe returns to contents

Miss Scarlet and Anathema; I'm fascinated by the downright cold-heartedness of Doctor O - I like pushing his boundaries, seeing how nasty he can get. But I think Grace is my favourite. She's got no malice in her. She only ever wants to do right, and it's interesting stretching someone like that. She's going to be pushed right to the limit, and she's going to have to do things she doesn't like doing. The interesting part is how she's gonna cope with it all. I also like the way that she's very feminine, very gentle – but you really don't want to mess with her. She's very powerful.

Wolverine in that respect, really. She's got a really wicked sense of humour - she gets all the best lines - and she's completely unpredictable. Oh, and she's rather sexy, too. It's gonna be great fun finding out what she's really all about – I've been dropping hints all over the place, and it's pretty shocking. She's a strong, interesting, well-rounded character, even though you don't really know the first thing about her.

BL: Who is your favourite O Men character, and why?
ME: I like different aspects of all of them. I like the upbeat nature and optimism of Rob; I like the unpredictability and quirkiness of

I think the thing about my characters is that they're all sympathetic – deep down, none of them are entirely evil or nasty (except for Anathema, although I find it quite fun trying to find ways for the reader to occasionally sympathise with her).

BL: There's a depth to your writing that seems effortless. Is it as easy to write as it is seems?
ME: I have to say I do find it easy to write **The O Men**. That's not bragging, it's just that it's such a slow process – I've been pretty much forging and planning this story for the past five years, I've got a massive folder of notes where I've written down ideas and plotlines and cool one-liners. When I get round to scripting an issue it's all there, ready to come out. It's like fitting a jigsaw puzzle together.

Plus, often the characters just write themselves. If I put 3 or 4 characters into a certain situation, Grace is going to behave in one way, and someone else would react in a completely different way. They're so strong that they sometimes dictate their own actions.

BL: Music seems to be an important influence on your creative process. How does music inspire you to create *The O Men****?***
ME: Music is a major influence in doing **The O Men**. I listen to stuff by Tori Amos, Bjork, PJ Harvey, Smashing Pumpkins and others, and it all helps to get me in the mood for drawing **O Men.** It'd probably be a completely different comic if I was a Steps fan (ie, it'd probably be shit). I'll literally see O Men scenes when I'm listening to music. That's happened quite a lot. There's a scene where Miss Scarlet's running round a building fighting loads of security guards which was completely inspired by a track from the Chemical Brothers' last album, and there's a Grace scene in Issue 13 which entirely came about from hearing GusGus' *Teenage Sensation*. Neither of those scenes were planned, but I'm really glad they happened. I made a little O Men soundtrack tape so that readers can find out where some of the scenes were inspired from.

BL: What comics, if any, have influenced *The O Men****? You've described the book as*** *X-Men* ***meets*** *Watchmen* ***meets*** **Eastenders, *but is there anything specific?***
ME: X-Men meets **Watchmen** meets *Eastenders* was just my clever marketing catchphrase, but I do think there are elements of each of them in there.

There are loads of influences. **The Sandman** is definitely one. I loved the massive cast of (very well written) characters who all dipped in and out of the storyline, and I liked the way mysteries were created which were mostly explained throughout the course of the series. Those are things that I'm doing in **The O Men**.

Doom Patrol, **The Invisibles** and *Zenith* are definitely influences - I like the sheer inventiveness of the characters and situations of each of them. Grant Morrison is amazing -

Click on Globe returns to contents

he knows exactly where he wants to take the stories and the characters, and he doesn't tend to disappoint.

Shade the Changing Man is another one - it was just such a beautifully written series - the characters were amazing.

John Byrne's work on **Alpha Flight**, **Fantastic Four** and **West Coast Avengers** is a massive influence. He was such a solid storyteller and he wasn't afraid to really turn his characters inside-out and really surprise the reader. I'll never forget **Alpha Flight #12** where he killed the team leader off.

I'd say another major influence - and it's not a comic - is the film *Alien*. Not only is it a shocking, exciting film, but Ripley is an amazing character. One of the strongest female characters in fiction, and I think there's a bit of her toughness and resilience in all the female characters in **The O Men**.

I think essentially what it boils down to is that I'm creating a comic that I'd probably enjoy reading myself - so it contains elements of all the comics I've ever really enjoyed.

BL: A number of readers have also picked up on the Grant Morrison influence, with** Doom Patrol **and Zenith being mentioned most often. How far has Morrison's writing influenced you?

ME: I've read his stints on *Zenith*, **Doom Patrol** and **The Invisibles** at least half a dozen times each, so I think its natural that the influence will seep in. I love the way his characters talk - very realistic, lively, fun dialogue.

*BL: What do you think of Morrison's current **X-Men** run?*

ME: I'm absolutely loving it, even though it feels like he's on auto-pilot. It doesn't feel like his strongest work, although he's probably building up to something amazing as he normally does. Every line Emma Frost utters is pure brilliance, Cyclops has never been more interesting and the Beast and Wolvy are really strongly characterised. It's like reading a movie - especially things like the ending of one of the most recent issues (Jean Grey: "define defenseless"). Awesome!

BL: Let's start messing around with the ever interesting hypothetical questions. If one of the big comics companies offered you a job, what would your ideal job be? Which title would you really like to work on, and who else, if anyone, would be on your creative team?

ME: When I was a kid I always wanted to draw the **X-Men**, just so that I could find out what Chris Claremont had planned before everyone else! (I also wanted to be a newsagent for the same reasons...)

It's funny you should ask that, because I've always thought of **The O Men** as a hobby. Someone asked me the other day where I saw myself in 5 years time, and after I answered him he pointed out that I hadn't even mentioned anything to do with comics! So I haven't really pinned my hopes on doing comics professionally, but I guess it would be nice to be paid to do something I really loved.

Any of the X-titles would be a dream job. Or a Vertigo comic, maybe. A Vertigo comic called "The O Men" would be pretty cool... Hee hee. Seriously though, I love drawing, so anything would be great. Perhaps a team book, cos I like drawing a variety of people.

BL: If a professional gig like this did come up, and turned into something more regular, where would that leave** The O Men**?

ME: We'll cross that bridge if and when we come to it. If it really got to a stage where I didn't have time to do **The O Men** then I'd probably do some kind of wrap-up issue. It wouldn't be a normal issue, it'd be more of an autobiographical comic, where I talk about some of the plot secrets which were going to happen.

BL: From your editorials, letter replies, and the plot itself, it seems that you've got a pretty well thought out long term plan for the book. What are your plans for** The O Men **for the next year? Beyond that?

ME: Next year is gonna be brilliant. I can't tell you how excited about the next few issues I am. There's some really shocking revelations and some really cool storylines coming up. I'm going to be playing around with some exciting new characters (Rob's sister Vixen and the American team, the USaviors) and bringing some old faces back. Basically, there's about 5 fun, experimental issues coming up, and after that there's the big, mind-blowing 10-part finale to volume one. At the moment I'm managing to get around 4 or 5 issues out per year, so that's my next few years sorted out! Beyond that, who knows? Hopefully I'll do volumes 2 and 3. I know that volume 2 will be 12 issues long, and feature a different incarnation of **The O Men**.

I also think that **The O Men** would make an absolutely cracking animated series. It would be amazing.

BL: At the rate you're going, understandable for a purely solo effort to this standard, do you think that second and third volumes of The O Men are realistic goals?

ME: It's too early to say. As things stand, I have more than enough ideas for volumes 2 and 3, and a lot of the series' questions are set to be answered towards the end of volume 3. So I do want to do them, most definitely - there's some cool stuff I can do with Rob, Miss S and a new character called "Asylum". But you never know what you'll be doing in 3 or 4 years time do you, really?

BL: This interview will be published in the first** Borderline **of the new year. So, what have been your comics-related highs and lows of 2001?

ME: Highs: Marvel. I would never in a million years have thought that I'd ever buy **Amazing Spider-Man** and X-titles again, but they're just so damn good now. **New X-Men** has

Click on Globe returns to contents

been great and **X-Force** is amazing too. I've really enjoyed Alan Moore's **Top Ten** and **Tomorrow Stories**, too. **Promethea** was fantastic, but has got a bit too lecture-y recently. **Murder me Dead** was fab.

Lows: I used to be a Vertigo Comics junkie, but they don't release anything I like anymore, so that's a bit disappointing. I wish they'd come up with something as amazing as **Shade**, **Sandman** or **The Invisibles**. Other lows: **Uncanny X-Men**, **X-treme X-Men**, **The Monarchy** has been disappointing... The *From Hell* movie was terrible (how could they have got it so wrong?!!!)...

BL: What have been the best and worst moments of The O Men so far, both in the comic itself and the production of it?
ME: The best moments are when I get feedback on an issue - whether it's from a reader or in a review. It's nice to know that someone's taken time out to read it, and appreciate it, and, even better, "get" what's going on. Sometimes I'll have gone for a few days without doing any O Men, but when I get a nice letter it makes me want to do more work. It's amazingly rewarding to think that someone's taken time out to write a 2 or 3 page letter about my comic.

The worst aspect is just the physical getting round to doing the comic. I've been doing **The O Men** for 3 years, and I still haven't found a way of juggling my work life, my social life and doing **The O Men**. Days can go by when I haven't had chance to do any O Men, and I'll get really annoyed with myself, 'cos the ideas are still whirling around in my head.

BL: How do you feel about the critical appreciation (very favourable* Comics International *reviews, Eagle nominations two years running) that* The O Men *has received?
ME: I'm flabbergasted. Every time I put an issue out I have absolutely no idea what people are going to make of it, so good reviews etc are amazing to me.

BL: Why do you think people appreciate ***The O Men*** *so much?*
ME: They seem to like the characters and the general direction of the story. A lot of people have really got into it. I think maybe it's cos their expectations of a small press comic aren't massively high, so they get a nice surprise when they find so much going on.

BL: If you don't mind me asking, how many copies of The O Men are sold on average with each issue?
ME: Let's just say I would be happier with more! It's quite frustrating because I have a nice set of regular readers who really enjoy **The O Men**, and I just think there's potential for a big audience out there. I sought the advice of someone who's been in the comic business for years and he basically told me that in its current A5 format, I'd probably never sell more than a certain amount of copies of each issue. People just don't want to buy the format (even though I think it's really cool!). I constantly think about changing the format, and I wish I could find time to sort something out. I think trade paperback collections are definitely worth considering.

BL: What comics are you currently enjoying?
ME: Oh, **New X-Men**, **X-Force**, **Alias**, **Planetary**, **The Establishment**, **Daredevil**, **Love and Rockets**, **Amazing Spidey**, **Catwoman**, **Stray Bullets**, **Optic Nerve**... There's probably a few more, but those are the main ones...

BL: What about films, TV, books? What are you enjoying in those media?
ME: Films... I can't say I've really enjoyed many films this year. It comes to something when *Jurassic Park 3* stands out as the film I've enjoyed the most! Oh, *The Others* was good. TV: *Buffy* is consistently excellent, *X-Files*, *Farscape*... any sci-fi really - I don't really watch normal telly like dramas and stuff. I'll tell you the best thing, though - *Angel*. Season 3 is astonishing. Some really excellent, shocking storylines. Books: I only ever seem to read Stephen King...

BL: *The O Men* ***has a realistic feel, without falling into the trap of being unnecessarily dark and gritty. The dark and gritty trend in superhero comics is considered by some (including Alan Moore and Frank Miller, who arguably started it) to be a mistake. Would you agree? What do you think superheroes should be like, and what are your general feelings about current superhero comics?***
ME: I don't think dark and gritty is a mistake at all. It doesn't matter that **Watchmen** and **Dark Knight Returns** are dark and gritty, because they're so well written and entertaining. If something was really that relentlessly grim then I think it would be unreadable. Look at *Eastenders* – how depressing is that?! I can't watch it anymore. I think somewhere along the line the writers mixed up the words "drama" and "misery". **Dark Knight Returns** and **Watchmen** had such an amazing impact on comics – they brought the general public's attention to the genre in a major way, and they also helped comics grow up a bit. They helped comics get away from the godawful. camp image earned by the 60s *Batman* TV show.

The most important thing is that a comic's well written - ie, something with characters and storylines which involve you. That's why I enjoyed John Byrne's **Alpha Flight**, **Strikeforce Morituri**, Claremont's **X-Men**, and the various Morrison series. It's like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (the TV show) - the writing is amazing – there's always loads going on and it can effortlessly switch from being laugh-out loud funny to deadly serious. That's good writing.

At the end of the day, the good thing about comics is that there's something for everyone out there. Whether you want lightweight superheroics, or dark and gritty or whatever, if you want it it's out there. I think the best comics have elements of all of the good stuff – and that's what I'm aiming for with **The O Men**.

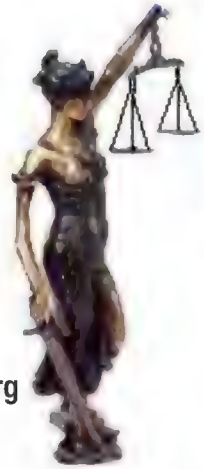
BL: Thanks Martin! Is there anything you'd like to add before we wrap up?
ME: Yeah! Thanks for having me, and check out **The O Men** web site at *www.theomen.free-online.co.uk*! BL

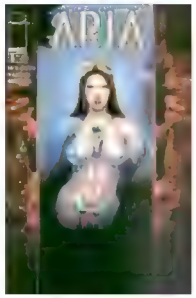
Click on Globe returns to contents

VERDICT COMICS REVIEWS

THIS MONTH'S JURY:

D.R. Booth
Ade Brown
Andy Cheverton
Mark Clapham
Jennifer Cole
Phil Hall
Rol Hirst
Andrew Lewis
Nigel Lowrey
Kevin Schomburg
Martin Shipp
Mike Sivier
Andy Winter





Aria: The Soul Market #5
Image
By Brian Holguin, David Yardin and Lan Medina

More of an impulse buy than anything and I really should have been put off by the cover. Pretty girl... flashing her boobs... slinky costume... seductive look on the girl's face... it stunk of low quality and pandering to the fan with one hand down his urine-stained underpants.

Should I leave now, before I upset anyone else? I bought this because of that old chestnut - word of mouth, the thing that can work better than a multi-million pound advertising campaign - and to be fair I didn't really pay the cover a lot of attention when I quickly stuck it in my pile of buys. Of course, when I got home I was mortified and thought I'd just handed Image $2.95 and a handkerchief full of my seed.

I barely understood a word of it (coming in 5/6ths of the way through a story does that), but I sort of picked up the gist on my second read. Yeah, *second* read! This was fairly impressive... In fact, by Image's falling standards this is a masterpiece, and not only does Image have a potentially future X-Men artist in the form of David Yardin, but I can't understand why Brian Holguin hasn't been given more writing assignments for the big boys. At least he understands the workings of the English language, compared with someone like Devin Grayson, who probably has a better grasp of Mark Waid's bollocks than she does of English. Holguin's dialogue, pacing and overall story idea is applaudable.

This is a distinctly European comicbook. A hybrid of the UK and Spain perhaps? But one thing is for sure, it's far too sophisticated for the average Image fan. It won lots of plaudits for Jay Anacleto's pencilled artwork. Anacleto is here, with spot illos and snippets of future projects, but he's not in the same league as Yardin - who I believe is slightly let down by his inker, one Lan Medina (any relation?).

Now for the sad part. I'm hooked. Holguin and Yardin have sold **Aria** to me. So, I checked on eBay for the missing issues. #3 and #4 won't cost me the Earth... #1 and #2 would put me off of buying comics again if I was new to this crazy hobby. I suppose I could wait for the Image trade paperback, but with **Aria**'s schedule apparently being an issue when they can be botheredI may well forget about this before that happens.

It beggars belief that Image can produce a title of this quality in the same month as something as woeful as the current **Tomb Raider**. What the company needs is more editors commissioning stuff like this and less manga-esque tripe that tells a single story in half a dozen issues.

The Verdict: Unexpected and entertaining. Ignore the hype and just treat yourself to a better quality of comic from the 10th anniversary boys. (DRB)

The Authority #27
Wildstorm
By Mark Millar and Art Adams

At last, nearly a year after part one, comes the second instalment of Mark Millar's final **Authority** story. After a high profile start to his run and a reasonably regular schedule, this title has really been beset by problems ranging from the departure of artist Frank Quitely to dealing with the political fallout following the events of September 11.

A recap for those that have forgotten the storyline: The Authority have become an embarrassing thorn in the side of the United States and the other members of the G7 group of major industrial democracies. The G7 solution to the problem is to sic on them a six billion dollar cyborg hillbilly called Seth. The short bloody battle took down not only most of the team but also The Carrier, their reality-navigating vessel, leading to the formation of a new Authority hand picked by the G7.

The continuation of the story was never going to hold up to nearly a year's worth of anticipation, but at least the scenes with the New Authority go some way to erasing Tom Peyer's short run on the title from our collective memories. Elsewhere in the issue Millar details the vicious degradation visited upon the-not-as-dead-as-we-had-been-led-to-believe members of the original Authority, while remaining members, The Midnighter and the uber-powerful Jenny Quantum, plot their revenge.

The artwork by Art Adams is as gorgeous and detailed as ever, but the script comes off as a little laboured, giving the impression that the creative spark that powered this series has been extinguished. This is

Would you like to join our reviews team – The Borderline Psychotics? All you have to do is send a sample of two reviews to Andy Winter: reviews@borderline.mediahall.co.uk and he'll get in touch!

Black Hole #9
Fantagraphics
By Charles Burns

In the world of **Black Hole**, teenagers are struck with a disfiguring, sexually transmitted disease, leading the afflicted to isolate themselves in a camp in woodland close to their hometown. Each victim is affected differently and, because the disease is only transmitted sexually, the camp is open to other sympathetic teenagers.

This is the premise around which Burns starts his story, and it is also where he stops it. As a metaphor, the disease is simple and effective, and as an allegory, this comic is equally simple and all the more effective for it. These are stories about isolation and loyalty, friendship and loss, and little concerned with the adult side of the coin, even if there were one.

While there might be many writers tackling similar themes, none of them are doing so with Burns' artwork; a dark, solid and almost entirely unique style of comic art using lushly textured brushwork that is breathtaking in its beauty. Nobody draws a comic page like Charles Burns.

The Verdict: An uncompromising view of teenage dissension and camaraderie told in vague, unsettling chapters. The entire run is currently in print from the publisher. (AC)

Click on Globe returns to contents

a shame because, at its height, **The Authority** under Millar and Quitely was one of the most interesting superhero comics around. Now the title just looks set to sink beneath the waves of editorial indifference as DC, not knowing what to do with a book about extreme heroes and gay versions of their leading brand heroes, seem willing to watch the comic die.

The Verdict: Not as good as it has been, but still, buy this comic now, because it's uncertain if you'll see its like for a while. (RC)

Cerebus #273
Aardvark-Vanaheim
By Dave Sim and Gerhard

An entire issue devoted to Cerebus' attempts to limp out of the sanctuary before the Cirinists arrive to kill him in some imaginative way may seem dull when described to non-readers but with Cerebus, where the story is going is less important than how it gets there.

I say "limp" because, believing himself to be a character called Rabbi, the aardvark at first tries to fly out – falling into the crypt and breaking his leg.

The ensuing dialogue between the different voices in his head is priceless, and suggests that **Cerebus** may actually be at its best when the title character is on his own.

The Verdict: Vintage stuff. If this could be bottled, Sim would make a mint. (MSh)

DK2 - The Dark Knight Strikes Again #1
DC
By Frank Miller and Lynn Varley

Why didn't I dare read this book when it came out? Were expectations running too high? Was I scared that the follow-up to one of the most influential books of the 80s would disappoint? Can Miller still pull it off? After all he had produced some rather unsatisfactory work over the last decade to set against some killer comics I absolutely adored. Two weeks and a Christmas hangover later I gave it a try – and I was in for an amazingly enjoyable ride!

In no way is the 21st century incarnation of Miller's aged Batman going to impress and influence the world of comics as much as **The Dark Knight Returns**, but it does not try to. Instead it wants to be enjoyed, it's a bare-knuckled pulp fiction story which screams out for consumption, and it leaves the reader with the assurance that Batman still kicks ass. (One guess whose?)

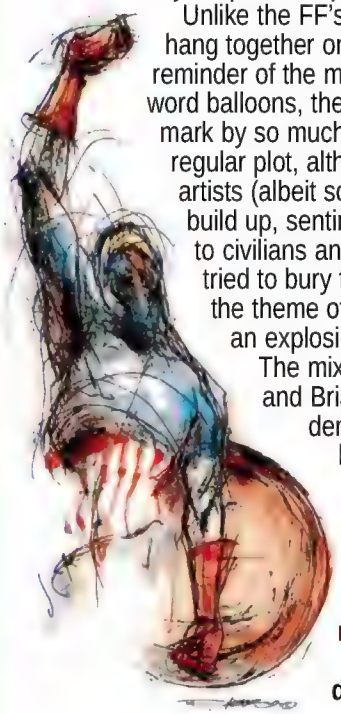
And not only he – three years after Bruce Wayne has faked his death in the final pages of **DKR** his alter ego has trained the mutant gang and former Robin Carrie Kelley to back him up in the form of the Batboys and Catgirl. Together with the Atom and Green Arrow this guerrilla force picks a fight with the totalitarian government of the USA, which controls politics, media, and, worst of all, the rest of the old JLA. The story is set in a world which has clearly changed over the last three years. Gone are the grim and gritty streets of Gotham City, gone are the days which reek of street violence, of despair and overwhelming angst. This is the new Millennium and it shows: **DK2** is pop art. Power is no longer executed by force, it's the knowledge of information and deceit which grants real control. News updates are not featured in static monitors any longer as they were in **DKR**; they run wild, erratic and strobe-like through the pages – but the media has lost its influence. And in this world stands the man who has always fought violence from the shadows, the detective, the planner, performing a 180° turn. He greets this new world with a good whuppin'!

DK2 is clearly intended for those who have read its first chapter and any reader who is not familiar with at least some of DC's major characters will feel a bit lost in its funky coloured pages. What the art lacks in detailed background depiction and establishing shots, Miller has poured into satirical exaggeration of his characters and their interaction. His artwork steers more and more away from detail towards the depiction of movement, as his more recent work on **Sin City** had already hinted. However, where in some other books of his I really found this change in style disturbing, it very much suits the high-speed fireworks which is **DK2.**

The Verdict: Miller does it again. This refreshingly young and political comic is not what was expected, but it's more because it's different and it's new. An appealing change to hardboiled action in times when the regular bat-series already offer excellent stories themselves. (KS)

Captain America #50
Marvel
By various writers and artists

Cap is dead? Ho hum. Yes, Marvel, of course we believe that one, especially without a body to show for it (nor even, crucially, Cap's shield).



Unlike the FF's anniversary issue, this collection of short pieces is a mismatch that doesn't really hang together on any level. The first story – the silent month tie in – is a competent if somewhat twee reminder of the moral map Cap (the comic and the guy in the suit) plays on. Despite the return of the word balloons, the second is a pointless and meandering bit of directionless sentiment that misses the mark by so much you're left not even aware of what the mark might have been. Then we're back to the regular plot, although it's actually little more than a framing sequence for some pin-ups by a variety of artists (albeit some of which are rather nice), and on to a quick excuse to 'kill' Cap off without any build up, sentiment or drama, so that the comic can finish up with showing us how much Cap means to civilians and the costumed community alike as they all give eulogies we heard the last time they tried to bury the Star Spangled Avenger too quickly. If they wanted nine pages of talking heads on the theme of "what Captain America means to me", we really didn't need (or want) the excuse of an explosion and a lot of rubble. Couldn't the Avengers just have thrown a party?

The mix of styles is interesting – from Dan Jurgens' Marvel house heroics, to Jen Van Meter and Brian Hurtt's almost Beto Hernandez-esque tale of kids hearing the news of Cap's demise in school, to Kathryn Kurder and Stuart Immonen's more "realistic" depictions – but you can't help feeling that such an iconic character deserves more than a chance for Marvel to try out some new blood. Or if they had to hand over so much of the book to the new boys and girls, surely they could have found at least one who actually had something to say?

And what's this at the back? A preview of what's coming next? Well, we could admonish Marvel for spoiling the surprise that in a few issues Cap will appear to be very much alive and well, but what's the point when we never believed them anyway?

The Verdict: An inauspicious anniversary for a Marvel icon, who surely deserves better. (JC)

Eightball #22
Fantagraphics
By Daniel Clowes

If you saw and liked the movie *Ghost World* then this is a cheap and easy way to find out if you'd like a Dan Clowes comic. It's cheaper than any of the **Eightball** collections and it pretty much covers most of the subjects and characters that you'd generally find therein.

Although seemingly a collection of "29 stories in full colour", these

Click on Globe returns to contents

actually comprise one long, 38-page tale, told from the differing viewpoints of all the characters involved, both integral and peripheral. It's the best issue of **Eightball** for a good, long while and a little masterpiece in itself.

Clowes' characters seem to exist in that odd, twilight world where Todd Solondz and the Coen Brothers do their best work; his kids talk beyond their years in an existential stream of consciousness that is eerie and unsettling, and his adults are even worse. While you would be hard pressed to like any of them, it is their story that engages, and this is to give more credit to their creator.

The sly intricacies of the storytelling will give any reader the satisfaction of repeated readings, and the simple classicism of the art make this easily understood to seasoned comic readers as well as the complete novice.

The Verdict: This is a tremendous showcase for Clowes' talents, which could be sold to any fan of *Ghost World* the movie with ease and confidence. In fact, it's so good you should read it even if you didn't like the movie. (AC)

The Fall

Drawn & Quarterly

By Ed Brubaker & Jason Lutes

Originally published by Dark Horse, this is a fast-moving thriller in which one small crime traps a young garage attendant in a spiral of murder, blackmail and crooked cops. Ed Brubaker is at his best with material like this – as demonstrated in Vertigo's **Scene of the Crime** – and ties everything together expertly as the mystery slowly unravels. This is loser-noir, with a hero that would fit in just as well in a Daniel Clowes strip, illustrated with crisp detail by Jason Lutes. The unnecessary double pun title grates a little – but it's a tiny flaw in an otherwise engrossing book.

The Verdict: Rattling along at breakneck pace, yet taking time with its characters too – an exciting murder mystery. (RH)

Fray # 5

Dark Horse Comics

By Joss Whedon and Karl Moline

Anyone watching the first episodes of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* would have quickly realised that they were onto something a bit special. Anyone watching beyond the first season would have been amply rewarded with what is quite certainly the most adventurous genre show ever to be on the air.

This miniseries reads just like the best of the TV episodes; each instalment has a twist or a turn that, more often than not, throws the reader for a loop, and veers the story in a new direction. In this issue, we find out why new Slayer Melaka Fray doesn't have the inherited memories of previous Slayers to draw upon, and the identity of the mastermind who is behind the rapid expansion in the numbers of Lurks in recent years. And both revelations are the sort of satisfyingly unlikely – yet logical – twists that fans will be used to, and yet rarely tire of.

Half the fun of this is trying to guess where the story will go next, all the while wondering why it all seems so fresh, as Fray bounces from being like Faith to being like Buffy, and all for totally believable reasons. There are plenty of clues in here as to the eventual fate of Buffy and the vampires and demons of her time, so that fans can get more from this series than simply what is on the page.

Which begs the question: why the hell isn't this selling to every *Buffy* fan on the planet? Of the hundreds of thousands of people who watch the show, and the thousands who buy the tie-in novels, why are they only selling 20,000 copies of this comic? This is as much a far-future sequel to the TV show as it is an independently enjoyable, top quality comic. As such, it should be outselling every other comic on the stands. You can't all be waiting for the trade.

The Verdict: The writing, pacing and invention are the equal of the *Buffy* TV show, and that is not a comparison to be made lightly. (AC)

Hellblazer #168

Vertigo

By Brian Azzarello and Giuseppe Camuncoli

Over the past couple of years, readers of **Hellblazer** have been treated to some truly sumptuous artwork. Say what you like about the slowness of some of the recent story arcs, they've looked good. This issue's self-contained story, *A Fresh Coat of Paint* is no exception.

First, Tim Broadstreet's cover is another mean and moody study of Constantine, with an ominous shadow leering up behind him to match his covers from Warren Ellis' run on the title. A really grubby raincoat and a pair of snake-eyes as JC sucks on a cigarette. Stark, yet deliriously effective.

Inside penciller Camuncoli manages a range of interesting angles to brighten up a sedentary story, while Cameron Stewart's bold inking lends a chiseled look to the whole thing. The colouring is perhaps a little lazy, especially in the last 11 pages, which would have worked just as well with a simple orange wash, there being no attempt at contrast.

And that's about all I can say in favour of this issue, because the rest left me feeling pretty empty.

OK, let's get one thing into the open. I think the purpose of a good comic should be to satisfy its reader. When I reach the end of an issue like this, that's not what I feel. I wonder whether the two quid I spent on it might have been better spent on something else. I wonder whether it's something I'll want to read again someday with affection.

Because John Constantine playing Bingo – that's right, *Bingo!* – and postulating in quite an ignorant way about how old people are sad and lonely and frustrated is not satisfying. And John Constantine talking dirty with a prostitute is just an insult to the character, to the readers, and, the way this issue sets about it, to women in general too.

And sadly all the cryptic hints at what's to come are becoming really somewhat boring.

I used to love this title. I can re-read earlier issues again and again and feel afraid, be moved to tears, laugh out loud... and always – *always* – feel satisfied.

The Verdict: Isn't it about time this title stopped trying to be something it isn't? (AL)

House of Java #4

NBM

By Mark Murphy

Recently divorced Jason returns to his hometown of Jacksboro, ostensibly to attend his cousin Karen's wedding, but also to take stock of his own life and – inadvertently – some ghosts of the past, which have never been properly buried.

Murphy fits a lot of story into his 23 pages (his first full-length tale in this comic) and each page has clever little details of characterisation that build one upon the other neatly. The reader is thrown in at the deep end, and will need to be able to remember each player as they are introduced but, aside from that, the story is clearly and effectively told. Refreshingly, there is no explosive climax, but an understated and educational close to the story that brings it full circle whilst also completing it.

The artwork effectively uses black and white to convey the varying moods, from light-hearted conversation to midnight excursions into the woods. Perhaps Murphy's inking is a little too solid and blocky on occasion, losing some of the subtleties, but overall the characters are easily identifiable and well expressed.

The Verdict: An excellent story touching on a varied palette of emotions, with a well-drawn cast and believable plot. (AC)

Just Imagine Stan Lee Creating The Flash

DC

By Stan Lee and Kevin Maguire

Maguire's art appears infrequently

Click on Globe returns to contents

these days but is always worth looking at. His clear, precise lines are an immense asset here, particularly as the story is so stupid! Stan's reimagining of the Flash starts with a blatant rip-off of *The Incredible Shrinking Man* as Mary Maxwell passes through a mysterious fog while at sea but grows lethargic as a result, necessitating an injection of hummingbird DNA that gifts her with super speed. I'm not a great intellect, but that seems too stupid to work even when suspending disbelief.

The Verdict: A truly ridiculous story that is too stupid to enjoy diminishes the great visual feast. (NL)

Kissing Chaos #4 & 5
Oni Press
By Arthur Dela Cruz

Hitting the halfway point of the story, lot of factors are coming into play as each main character brings with them more twists that entwine themselves into the continuing drama.

Despite much being made of the publishing format (shorter comics, published more frequently) this really seems as if it would read better in one sitting. Having said that, a second reading after this series finishes would be beneficial in itself, as there seem to be many more layers to the telling than are first apparent. For instance, the gun illustrating the contents page was used as a bridging sequence between two otherwise unconnected scenes in the first issue, hinting that perhaps the various stories of **Kissing Chaos** connected sometime before the series actually started. In that respect, I'm tending towards the theory that this comic is actually slightly compromised by its format, and that the reader would benefit from devouring this in one sitting, whether as a set of comics or as one trade collection.

As a comic creator, Dela Cruz has hit the ground running, offering simple yet effective characterisation, conveyed in sketchy, expressive artwork that builds up issue after issue to great effect. His lettering, while fine in itself, does have one major flaw: the tails on his speech balloons are simple lines; these are easily missed against the sketchy artwork, and almost invisible in darker scenes – in a speech heavy panel it is easy to lose the flow of dialogue.

The Verdict: The format may be flawed, and the lettering needlessly confusing, but the writing and drawing skills apparent in this comic bode well. (AC)

Love & Rockets #3
Fantagraphics
By the Hernandez Brothers

Large-breasted women, human tragedy, surrealism... well what do you expect? This is **Love & Rockets**...

A year ago Los Bros Hernandez seemingly realized that the fragmenting of their creative output into a series of hard-to-find individual titles wasn't the best way to perpetuate their reputation as cutting edge creators. So **Love & Rockets** was reborn, and while Beto has so far resisted the temptation to return to Palomar, we're on pretty familiar territory.

BRING MY SWIMSUIT. WHY, JUST SO YOU AND YOUR FRIENDS CAN TELL ME HOW I POP OUT ALL OVER THE FUCKING PLACE?
AND I COULDA SWORN VIVIAN WAS AT THE TOP OF HOPEY'S SHIT LIST.
NNNGHHH...

Jaime's continuing saga of Maggie now sees its protagonist, complete with middle-aged cellulite, forging a new friendship with the curvaceous Vivian while Hopey remains resolutely sidelined for the time being. The artwork is as super-smooth as ever, a six-frame grid working effectively. Maggie and her new pals take advantage of a house with a swimming pool whose owners are away on holiday. The owners come back. Maggie sneaks away unseen. This is soap opera, comics-style – but it's 20 times more satisfying than TV soap. And it's more fun than a lot of comics too.

Gilberto's latest series, *Julio's Day*, is rapidly achieving classic status. Last issue's instalment centring on childhood bullying and loss of innocence actually prompts a worrying response from clearly a new reader in this issue's letters page. The poor guy, as well as being offended by the presentation of Hispanic people in **L&R** (!) claims to have been "shocked and appalled" by the story and goes on to suggest future issues should be less "depressing".

Well, he'll be slashing his wrists after the climax of issue #3's episode.

I'm afraid I must confess to being disappointed with Mario and Beto's *Me For the Unknown*. It has its moments, but the jumping around from one location and story strand to another has resulted in a disjointed narrative at best.

More over-sized mammary glands, and hesitant love in the last story this issue, the self-contained *The High Soft Lisp*. Entertaining enough, but it's the opening pair of stories this issue which offer the most rewards.

The Verdict: When it's good, it's very, very good. When it's not it's still worth reading. (AL)

New X-Men #119
Marvel
By Grant Morrison and Igor Kordey

Only a few short months after we all fell over ourselves squealing and fawning over this comic, now might be a good time to step back and take a more concentrated and somewhat harsher look at the thing.

For a start, this series could do with an artist; someone who would get the book out once a month, every month, like comic artists are supposed to do. At the moment, "regular artist" Frank Quitely is just about managing to provide the covers for each issue, although I wouldn't be prepared to stand by that statement by the time this sees print. Why anyone employs Quitely on a monthly comic is quite beyond my understanding. And now even "fill-in artist" Ethan Van Sciver has gone AWOL, leaving Igor Kordey to pick up this issue in the middle of a storyline.

This would be surmountable if Morrison compensated for the diversionary artwork by providing a cohesive plot, but he doesn't. Relying on this year's annual for its background, the story isn't going anywhere, fast or otherwise. The sheer, inventive pace of Morrison and Quitely's first issues is entirely absent here: rather, grotesque science and snappy dialogue are relied on to carry the story onwards. We have more and more of the Xavier schoolchildren being portrayed as being physically mutated to a ridiculous degree, only to facilitate the needs of the story, and even then to little avail. After Marvel's rejection of the Comics Code, we still have characters uttering the likes of "Like ****!" – either you can curse or you can't, I just wish Marvel would decide which.

The Verdict: Over-plotted, meandering and interminable storylines coupled with a lucky dip approach to the art team results in an eerily familiar read. I thought this was supposed to be the *New* X-Men? (AC)

The Norm: Keys # 1
The Norm.Com
By Michael Jantze

Actually, this might be called House,

Click on Globe returns to contents

or House: Keys, or Keys: House. If you ask for **The Norm: Keys: House #1** you might find it. And I'm not 100 per cent sure about that publisher listed above either, if you want the truth. It's all very well being clever and idiosyncratic but if I can't tell you fine people what the bloody thing is even called or who it is published by then Jantze's word of mouth sales are going down the toilet.

So, this is a beautifully packaged collection of *Norm* strips, which made me laugh (the strips, not the packaging). Norm appears to be a typical gag-strip everyman – unrequited love, a crap job, yet a nice way with the one-liner. Add a few videogame and *Star Wars* references and it's like *Mallrats* without the swearing, or **Dilbert** with humour. I laughed, I cried, I nodded sagely in sympathy, and then I ignored the wife and turned on the Nintendo for the evening.

There's an art to the traditional three-panel strip, which Jantze seems to have mastered mostly by writing four-panel strips, but they do follow on one from the other, giving the reader a narrative to follow.

The Verdict: A high quality collection of truly funny strips forming a comic-sized tale, almost the funniest thing I've read this month. (AC)

Queen & Country #5
Oni Press
By Greg Rucka and Brian Hurtt

Beginning this title's anticipated Taliban storyline, we are also given an afterward by writer Rucka detailing the elements leading to the story, although there can be few to whom such information is as revelatory as it might have been. Yet, it is heartening to see that someone is attempting to do something with their fiction, and that some publishers are willing to stand behind such work. Rucka is such a writer, and Oni Press is such a publisher, providing almost certainly the best quality alternative comics currently on the shelves, given Dark Horse's recent dereliction of duty in favour of yet more needless TV and movie tie-in shelf fodder.

This issue finds main protagonist Tara Chace sidelined as other, male operatives are sent to Afghanistan to recover lost intelligence before it falls into the wrong hands. Chace still has a role in the tale however, reticently attending sessions with a psychiatrist after the events of the first four issues.

This storyline is not illustrated by Rebecca Woods as was solicited, but replacement artist Hurtt renders the story cleanly and clearly, letting the grit and authenticity of his art attend to the realism that is clearly at the forefront of Rucka's mind. His style is little different from that of previous artist Steve Rolston, and his likenesses of all the main characters are accurate, which helps the cohesion between this and the last issues.

The Verdict: Brave, relevant storytelling, avoiding sensationalism and yet remaining topical and informative. Doubtless the politically correct brigade will want it banned. If you see them on the road, run them over. (AC)

Paradise Too #4
Abstract Studio
By Terry Moore

More of the **Strangers in Paradise** creator's whimsical sketches, political cartoons and general fun stuff.

There's always something in this little gem to make you laugh. Strangely enough, that makes it one of the first comics this reviewer opens when the monthly pile turns up.

Perhaps this is an indication of where mainstream comics need to go, in which case the message from Paradise Too to the industry is: Lighten up!

The Verdict: A laughter break in the morass of comicbook soap operas. (MS)

The Red Star: Transformation
Image Comics
By Bradley Kayl & Christian Gossett

This is a reprint of the **Wizard #½** edition of the comic, although the cover numbers it as #7.5, as it slots nicely into the ongoing story, courtesy of some new pages and slightly re-jigged art. As an introductory issue it works quite well, going back further into the back-story than any issue thus far, giving new readers a solid grounding into the tale as it stands currently.

Taking as its historical cue Russia's involvement in the conflicts in Chechnya and Afghanistan, **The Red Star** presents an alternate universe take on the subjects of war, friendship and patriotism in a world where old myths walk the earth and sorcery can be harnessed and deployed against the enemy. It is a harsh and heartfelt comic, rendered more real by its unflinching look at the people involved in conflict rather than the spectacle presented.

Not, it must be said, that this comic is afraid to show the devastation of war; utilising pencils, digital painting and 3D computer modelling, the art team render the awe of fighting machinery and the scale of destruction necessary to such a tale, while making the comic look like little else available on the shelves today.

The Verdict: A mature look at the highs and lows of war, written with a solemnity that pitches the title perfectly between the too sincere and the overly mawkish. (AC)

Rail
Image
By Del Stone Jr & Dave Dorman

This is a prestige format one-shot that follows the escapades of a ranger called Edge as he travels across a decimated landscape in the future USA, meeting various friends and enemies. Apparently, this project has been in development a long time... not long enough though. Dorman's line art works quite nicely with the painted colours but his faces are weirdly off balance and that is a big distraction. The approach to the story throws us straight into a future that is obviously fully realised to the creators but that sadly doesn't come across in the stuffy, lifeless script. The only gem of potential comes eight pages from the end as we learn that Edge has a purpose that will be developed in further stories. Unfortunately, this one was so deathly dull it is doubtful whether readers will return for more.

The Verdict: Nicely produced, but too boring to engage the reader. (NL)

The Sandwalk Adventures #1
Active Synapse
By Jay Hosler

The naturalist Charles Darwin is working in his room one day when a follicle mite in his eyebrow begins to talk to him. These follicle mites worship Darwin as the Flycatcher of their myths, and this particular mite would like to question its deity about a couple of points. Darwin, of course, quite reasonably – yet amiably – assumes he is losing his grip on sanity.

Hosler's stated intention is to educate through entertainment, and in this he is successful. The tale is told via the myths of the follicle mites and through Darwin's daily routine, and all of these pages are comprehensively annotated at the back of the comic, along with a useful bibliography of Darwin-related sources.

If this makes the comic sound a

Click on Globe returns to contents

2000AD Prog 2002

Rebellion

By various writers and artists

Remember those old Christmas issues of **2000AD** that used to feature Tharg the Mighty on the cover dressed up as Santa Claus? Well, this Christmas the great green Betelguesean has presented us with a festive treat to rival the finest offerings of Saint Nick himself. **Prog 2002** is a 100-page thrill-feast that'll blow your circuits should you attempt to read it in one sitting.

It also serves as a fine jumping on point for new or lapsed readers - and it certainly deserves to be read. Yes, we all know how the **2000AD** readership dwindled through the 90s, many loyal Squaxx dek Thargo becoming non-scrots because too many of the strips on offer had become, well... non-scrot themselves. But all that's changed. Today's **2000AD** is a revitalised creature, exciting, vibrant... zarjaz! And if you're not reading it then a quick glance at **Prog 2002** should put things right.

There are two *Dredd* strips, the first seeing the return of antagonist Slick Dickens, a man who will kill Judge Dredd just to get his hands on a pair of "Eltons" – silver platform boots. There's the return of fan-favourite *Nikolai Dante*, drawn by its co-creator Simon Fraser. After John Burns' graphic scenes of warfare in recent story-arcs, it's bar room brawls and nuns in wet clothes in the first double-length episode of *The Return of the Gentleman Thief*. And there's *Sinister Dexter*, too, the future hitmen spreading their own message of Christmas peace and goodwill – "Ho! Ho funtin' ho!"

Nestling in amongst these is the return to the fold of Pete Milligan with the strip that first brought him to prominence – *Bad Company*, again drawn by Ewins and McCarthy. And living legend Bryan Talbot's bleak 12-page *Memento* sees the creator's first work in **2000AD** since he gave Kev O'Neill a run for his money on *Nemesis the Warlock*.

There are two new strips from the "next generation" too – Gordon Rennie and Frazer Irving cement their reputation as comicdom's Morecambe and Wise from Hell with the first part of *Storming Heaven*, resurrecting the Rubber Souled Beatles, Huxley, Jim Morrison and Charlie Manson in a psychedelic Brave New World which promises to be every bit as deliciously warped as last year's *Necronauts*. Robbie Morrison's heavy metal laze-fest *Shakara* affords Henry Flint another opportunity to step out from the shadows of the great artists of the past and forge his own style, which should develop to be every bit as distinctive as that of McMahon or O'Neill.

All this plus the anorak's guide to **2000AD** that is the fun '"Tharg's Top 10 of Thrill-power" (Greatest Hero, Most Desirable Sexpot, Looniest Bampot, etc), some cool pin-up images (especially Cam Kennedy's nostalgic splash of *The VCs*) and some glimpses of forthcoming attractions add up to a fine end-of-year celebration, as well as an extremely satisfying launch into a new year under new editor Matt Smith.

The Verdict: Don't let the somewhat bland cover put you off; this is an essential purchase. (AL)

---

little dry, then I should state that this isn't the case; Hosler's writing is witty and fresh, inserting biographical and historical details quietly and unobtrusively into the story, while keeping the tone light and entertaining. His art is cartoony rather than realistic, which helps out no end. By the finish of this issue, the reader will be more interested and ready to read the texts at the back of the book, as they add to the depth of the story immeasurably.

The Verdict: A wonderful mix of cartoon fun and education for comic readers young and old. It will be greatly interesting to see how this series continues. (AC)

Sequential #7: Stand on a Mountain, Look Back

I Don't Get It Graphics

By Paul Hornschemeier

I recently raved within these pages about Hornschemeier's previous comic, **I Know God Smiles On These Good Times**, which made forking out $6.95 for this a moot point. Truly, it is a quite stunning looking book, on fine paper stock and with excellent printing and production values. The contents are a mixed bag, however.

Those stories that are part of ongoing series are difficult to judge; as instalments they are difficult to understand outside of their larger context and little thought seems to have been given to overcoming this. One of them – *The Devil's Lonely Day* – in particular is arranged as a cut-up style of story, which sounds like an interesting experiment but is unfortunately crippled by being published in instalments, not all them easily available.

Of the complete stories, *Ex Falso Quodlibet* (here expanded from the version previously printed in **Expo 2001**) is accomplished and affecting, as are *Objet D'Art* and *Jesus Was a Carpenter*.

But too many pages are wasted on ephemera and nonsense, in a manner familiar to fans of the similarly indulgent Paul Pope. A great shame, as **When God...** was one of the finest comic experiments I've read in a long while, and gave me hope that a new talent was on the horizon. That may well be, but not for a while yet.

The Verdict: About a standard comic's worth of good material, two of difficult to judge serials, and another two of absolute shite. (AC)

Tomb Raider: Journeys #1

Image/Top Cow

By Fiona Avery and Drew Johnson

Top Cow continues to milk its Lara Croft franchise with the addition of this new 12 issue series, devoted to the escapades of Lara on her journeys. While this is essentially the concept of the regular **Tomb Raider** series, what differentiates the two immediately is the art - because Johnson's work here leaves the regulars far behind. The usual scratchy, rugged and angular style is replaced by a slicker, smoother style

Click on Globe returns to contents

Ultimate Marvel Team-Up #11

Marvel

By Brian Michael Bendis and Chynna Clugston-Major

It seems that the Ultimate Marvel experiment is losing its way these days. While **Ultimate Spider-Man** is still going strong, updating the early years of Spidey in an effective and touching way, the other titles have started to drift. **Ultimate X-Men**'s second story arc was uninvolving, and followed up by, of all things, a Gambit story. And then there's **Ultimate Team-Up**, a title that seems to serve no other purpose than to allow Bendis to work his way through a tick list of the industry's top artists.

It's worth remembering the original purpose of the Ultimate Marvel project; to create streamlined, accessible versions of core Marvel characters, books which kids can pick up and comprehend without requiring any knowledge of continuity. It's hard to see how **Team-Up** fits into this plan, as all it seems to do is complicate the Ultimate universe with under-utilised versions of old Marvel characters. Does the Ultimate Marvel universe really need its own, barely indistinguishable, version of Daredevil? Why introduce an Ultimate Hulk for a two-issue story that adds nothing? And, if the purpose of the Ultimate range is to tell stories accessible to new readers, why produce an issue devoted to comics in-jokes like the enjoyable but self-indulgent issue #9?

Which brings us to the latest issue, where our younger, funkier Peter Parker goes to the mall and meets the Ultimate X-Men (before the recent *Return to Weapon X* storyline, just to confuse casual readers even further). There are a few nice jokes, and some lovely observations of teen life as Peter and his friends hang out. But the issue descends into an oh-what-it-is-to-be-a-mutant diatribe, as the out-and-proud X-Men are questioned by Peter's friends, while our hero hangs his head in shame at his own secrecy. There's a moral to the story, but it's muddled, over-cooked and slightly pointless.

It certainly doesn't require the talents of the excellent Ms. Clugston-Major to lay out such a simple moral fable. While the Jim Mahfood drawn issue #9 at least played to its artist's strengths, this issue could have been adequately drawn by anyone, and aside from the teen-romance elements there's no sign of the script being tailored to the creator of **Blue Monday**. There are no super-deformed versions of the characters wandering around the panels, no "magic realist" wackiness nor gross-out moments. It's a mainstream waste of a major talent, work-for-hire nonsense at its worst. Only a solitary cameo by Oni editor Jamie S. Rich in a crowd scene reminds you of the possibilities Bendis fails to engage with.

It's not a bad issue by any means, and there are far worse ways of spending 15 minutes than looking at Clugston-Major's lovely, expressive artwork. But it should be far, far better considering the talent involved, and bringing Spidey into contact with a series of other heroes and guest artists only serves to dilute the impact of the main **Ultimate Spider-Man** title. At this rate new readers brought in by the *Spider-Man* movie are going to find Ultimate Spidey's world just as inaccessible as the original's.

The Verdict: Desperately insubstantial and dispensable, this is a sad waste of two great talents. (MC)

---

that is infinitely more appealing. Unfortunately the story concerning Lara's chance encounter with the crew of a pirate ghost ship is as pedestrian as the standard fare, although Avery does bring a spark to Lara's relationship with the roguish captain.

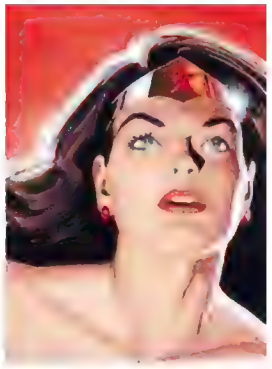
The Verdict: Better than the usual Tomb Raider **material, but still far from a satisfying read. (NL)**

Wonder Woman: Spirit Of Truth

DC

By Paul Dini and Alex Ross

This is the final issue in the series of oversized treasury format special editions by creators Dini and Ross devoted to DC's icon characters. As



with the previous releases, the plot here is less important than getting the character's voice across and the storybook approach to the text helps this but it does mean that the actual plot is merely there to hang a few musings from, and about, the character. The art is exactly what you would expect from Ross so it's pointless to describe it, other than to say that he does manage to get a lot of power shots of Diana into the sequences.

The Verdict: Expensive and slight, this is nevertheless an enjoyable product. (NL)

X-Force #122

Marvel

By Peter Milligan, Mike Allred

This comic's turning out to be a real "love it or hate it" thing, as evidenced on this issue's letters page.

This reviewer loves it. There's no supervillain battle in this issue, the second part of *Lacuna*, but it's still full of plots, intrigue, personal battles, vanity and vulnerability.

They're all very insecure, the members of the X-Force. It comes across very well as they circle each other metaphorically while discussing who should be a new member – and who should not.

The Anarchist's discomfort at having another token black man in the group is very post modern – but pure joy to wizened old comics cynics everywhere: "A new brother joins up and, hey, the poor brother that's already in the team better not start reading any long novels!"

The punchline is Lacuna's own response to being asked to join the team. On the letters page, **X-Force** is proving as controversial in real life as it is in the story. There are no less than three damning missives (out of six).

It may seem strange to praise the inclusion of attacking letters, but if anyone remembers the bad old days of only a few years ago, when Marvel only published gushing praise from frothing fanboys, you'll know what a step forward this is.

The Verdict: An X-comic with a sense of fun. (MS)

Click on Globe returns to contents

GOOD COP -V- BAD COP

Fury #4

MAX

By Garth Ennis and Darrick Robertson

Marvel might be upsetting a lot of long-time fans by turning super-spy Nick Fury into the gun-toting warmonger he always should have been, but at least they're turning out the best SHIELD stories they've ever published.

After three issues of Garth Ennis' trademark black humour and usual cast of bizarre and deliberately offensive weirdoes, this issue takes a slightly more serious turn. Fury gives a speech on how it's always the civilians who lose out in war and all he's doing is trying to make sure someone is there to protect them from the people who are worse than he is. The fact that he loves the battlefield so much is, one can only assume, a lucky bonus. Of course, there's the usual swearing and political correctness-ignoring we expect from Ennis as well, just in case we think for a second that we should be taking this comic even slightly seriously, but in general this is a straightforward war romp, sans superheroes, sans James Bond-esque gadgets and with its tongue planted firmly in its cheek. The real horror of war is, as we all know, that humanity enjoys it so much. So maybe Ennis is making serious political commentary after all…

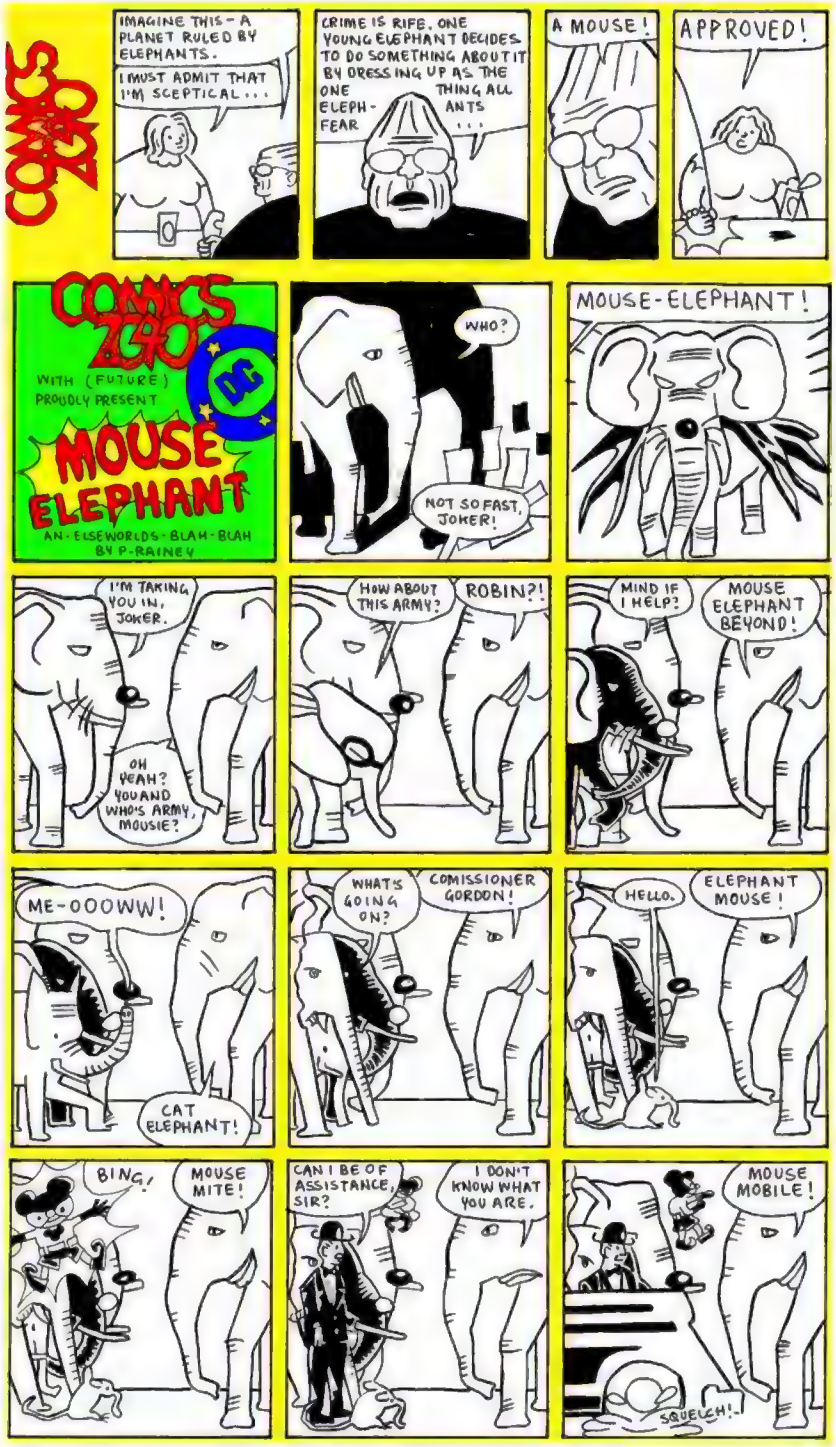
The Verdict: A true post-grim and gritty era successor to the Howling Commandos. (JC)

Ennis' Nick Fury is a man out of time, a cold warrior well past his sell by date, uncertain of his place in the world. Ironically, the book itself seems equally lost, torn between the seriousness and reality of Ennis' DC **War Stories**, and the grotesque black humour of his run on Marvel's **Punisher**. The results are an unsatisfactory compromise, too loaded with essays on the horrors of war and the inhumanity of political ambitions to make an amusing diversion, too lightweight and manic to do the serious material justice.

Issue 4 splits right down the middle – while Fury lectures his baffled subordinates on the relative military agendas of the United Nations and the United States, rogue Russian Gagarin and his sidekick Fuckface (The Russian + Arseface = Ennis Lite) engage in black comedy antics, abusing and molesting everything in their path. This is part 4 of a 6 part mini series, and it's quite clear that the issue quota was plucked out of thin air – the story doesn't justify the length, and this issue constitutes little more than two old enemies circling each other. Darrick Robertson's art is solid enough, but is limited by the banality of the characters and settings, as various military types wander around the jungle snarling and making speeches about the state of the world. Only in the comically grotesque figure of Fuckface does Robertson get to have any fun.

What **Fury** needs, more than anything, is a bit of discipline and a tighter vision. In trying to satisfy both the Vertigo crowd and the Punisher readership, MAX has succeeded in producing a launch title that will please nobody. Big names like Ennis are all well and good, but it'll take better books than **Fury** to establish MAX as a significant imprint.

The Verdict: An ill thought-out war thriller. MAX need to do a lot better than this. (MC)



Click on Globe returns to contents

NET VERDICT

Down the Tubes: A Writing for Comics Guide
(http://www.jfree.dircon.co.uk/comics/index.html)

This site is devoted, as one might expect, to providing advice on writing comics at a professional level. It is updated at fairly regular intervals. The main piece is very in depth, covering anything from original graphic novels to syndicated newspaper strips and everything in-between. Despite this level of detail, the advice is written in an informal and very accessible style.

Unlike the scribes of many "advice" books and websites, writer John Freeman claims to have had writing experience with *successful* comics companies, so the advice given is most likely half decent at least. The only real problem with this site is that although it's in depth, the main piece is not particularly long. There are links to other related pieces, however, and this page is a small part of a larger home page, where other, albeit less direct, information can be found.

The Verdict: An attractive site, very useful to the wannabe comics writer. (KG)

Next Comics
(www.nextcomics.com)

A website comics anthology with a growing catalogue of interesting strips, none diminished by the web format. The front page is a very concise and clear list of the latest works on offer, currently including work from Dan Curtis Johnson (writer of **Chase** for DC) and Mark Smylie (**Artesia**).

The Next Comics collective features work from some already published names, and that their work is available for free here should not reduce your expectations.

The range of stories as listed by the site goes from slice-of-life drama to psychological horror, but there is a dark fantasy feeling to much of the material.

In the complete archive there are 14 online comics - mainly short stories presented in episodic form, but some are excerpts from longer works. Some of the tales appeared in print in **Never Mind The Comics**, a compilation of work by newcomers prepared by Alistair Pulling for distribution at the Bristol comic convention earlier this year. This was given to interested publishers, editors and the like in order to promote the work of a collective of unknown comic artists and writers. It's a good chance to see that developing talent "before they were famous".

Especially worth a look is the lyrical suicide note in **Shotglass** by John Cecil, and if you've overlooked the comic series epic fantasy of Mark Smylie's **Artesia**, take a preview glance now.

The Verdict: Even if you think the Internet will not be the next big thing in comics, this website provides a preview of what will come next. (AB)

World Famous Comics
(*www.wfcomics.com*)

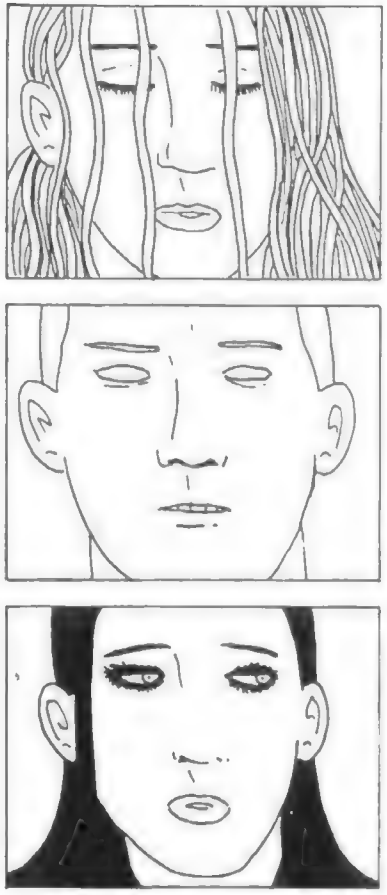
Trumpeting itself as "the ultimate comic book and entertainment website", WFC isn't quite all of that, but it is a darn good attempt nevertheless. With changing content daily, weekly columnists and news, it's worth a regular visit. It isn't visually stunning by any means (the text size would bring tears to an eagle's eyes), but there's still plenty of amusement to be found in columns by the likes of Bob Rozakis, or Bob Ingersoll's"The Law Is An Ass", which discusses the legal ramifications of superhero work. Something for everyone, in fact.

The Verdict: One to bookmark for those long winter nights. (DM)

ZINE SEEN

The O Men #12
£1.50, plus postage, from Martin Eden, 35 Woodbury Street, Tooting SW17 9RP

For a comic that has been nominated for an Eagle Award *and* has been called "Britain's première superhero book", I expected to have my socks knocked off. Instead I stumbled into a badly drawn small press venture with slightly better than average production values. However, this is about as bad a critique as I can offer, as **The O Men** is quite simply stunningly written; fluid



and suspenseful, and by the time I got to the end I wanted to read the first 11 issues. Rarely does any comic do that for me anymore - regardless of the fact that Martin Eden's artwork in earlier issues was apparently, er, less accomplished than it is now.

I'd never be presumptuous enough to tell the hard working small press contingent how to do something (Eden could well be the next Moore or Morrison on the evidence contained here), but I feel that given an SP artist with superhero experience (a Nigel Lowrey, for instance), then this might actually be seen and read by a lot more people.

I followed the story very well without the aid of the previous issues (a feat in itself) or levered-in synopses and I was taken in completely by the vision that Eden appears to have for his title - his enthusiasm hasn't waned and that should be a lesson to anyone who wants to do their own thing.

The Verdict: I can think of a lot of worse things to spend £1.50 on. Accomplished and mature superhero stuff – this is the real Authority! (PH)

Zarjaz #1
£2 plus 50p postage from Andrew Lewis, 39 Priory Court, Bryncoch, Neath SA10 7RZ

Did you know that Ricky Martin has his very own UK-based tribute band? Well, he does, they're called La Vida Loca (surprise, surprise) and have been spotted gigging in Essex very recently. What has any of this to do with the British small press scene? Not much, to be honest, other than the fact that **Zarjaz** is itself an unapologetic, no holds barred tribute, taking as its inspiration the 24-year-old British sci-fi weekly, **2000AD** (as opposed to a porky Latino singer of dubious reputation and musical ability).

A big plus for **Zarjaz** is that its editors seem to have done a deal with **2000AD** itself, meaning that they've been able to use the likes of Judge Dredd, Slaine and, er, Ace Garp in their stories, without fear of nasty letters arriving from Rebellion's lawyers as a result.

Like most anthologies, **2000AD** included, **Zarjaz**'s quality is pretty variable but there are some real gems here. Best by far is writer/artist Adrian Bamforth's three-page Dredd story, *Pret-A-Porker*, a beautifully realised, economically written satire on the absurdity of the fashion industry. With its great gags ("Where's the buffet in this place? I shudder to think how many calories I burned up under those lights."), nice art and laugh-out-loud ending, this is clearly worthy of a place in **2000AD** itself.

Andrew Lewis's *The Mind Of Wolfie Smith* is also pretty special, its evocative British seaside setting and terrific humour being more than enough to see off a twist ending that doesn't quite work. Lewis picks up extra kudos for being (to my knowledge) the first comics writer ever to reference Jenny Agutter's "knicker waving" scene from *The Railway Children* - you have to admit, it certainly makes a change from all those tired Tarantino/Leone riffs.

All in all, **Zarjaz**'s 64 A4-sized pages contain 13 short, sharp stories, none of which outstays its welcome or demands a degree in **2000AD** history to enjoy. OK, so some of the art is a bit rough and ready in places, and not all of the strips are anything like as good as the two mentioned above, but this is still an entertaining read and extremely good value for a small press project.

The Verdict: An essential read for any 2000AD **completist and a fine showcase for some of the UK underground's most promising young talents. (AW)**

Click on Globe returns to contents

VERDICT COLLECTED EDITION

Blue Monday: Absolute Beginners
Oni Press
By Chynna Clugston-Major

Blue Monday, Chynna Clugston-Major's ongoing saga of anglophile teens in early nineties America, returns for another mini series after the successful **The Kids Are Alright**. All four issues are collected in this digest-size paperback, along with some nice new sketches and the scripts for an aborted BM webtoon.

Absolute Beginners reads a lot better in one sitting than it did over four issues, with the intricate intrigues between the various smitten members of the gang a lot clearer without the long waits between installments. While **Kids** was a simple introduction to the BM world, focussing on Bleu's inner world and peppering it with broad comedy, **Beginners** takes us deeper into the aspirations of the rest of the cast as romantic complexities begin to set in.

Mod wannabe Alan Walsh realises he has feelings for Bleu while secretly videotaping her in the bath, and with delicious perversity begins to simultaneously woo Bleu while ruining her life with the illicit videotape. The aftershocks of this sudden emotional complication results in Victor and Erin trying to ruin Alan's chances, while Clover seeks vengeance on the soccer field. The introduction of Seamus the Pookah, a six foot tall talking Otter, introduces a surprising element of magic realism to the story, and provides even more chaos and slapstick in the hectic final issue, as Alan and Bleu's date is repeatedly disrupted.

With **Absolute Beginners**, Chynna Clugston-Major refines the **Blue Monday** formula, telling stories of teenage romance in a disarmingly comic and vulgar style. The manga-esque artwork perfectly accompanies the words, giving even the crassest jokes an aura of innocence. **Blue Monday** is by turns charming, hilarious, stylish and moving making **Absolute Beginners** absolutely essential.

The Verdict: More teen comedy from the talented Ms Clugston-Major. Buy today. (MC)

Batman: Evolution
DC Comics
By Greg Rucka,
Shawn Martinborough, Will Rosada and Phil Hester

The first post-*No Man's Land* Bat-collection has writer Greg Rucka bringing realism to Gotham, focussing on the politics of a city recovering from disaster (with tension growing between those who deserted during NML and those who stayed behind), and building the role of the GCPD. Rucka gives as much time here to Jim Gordon, Harvey Bullock

and Renee Montoya as he does to the Bat himself, and some impressive character studies follow - Gordon refusing to go home to an empty house, Montoya sharing birthday cake with Two-Face. Rucka's Batman is a creature of many faces - playing the grim detective one moment, allowing himself a sly grin or a secret moment of kindness the next - while the playboy Bruce Wayne act has rarely been more convincing.

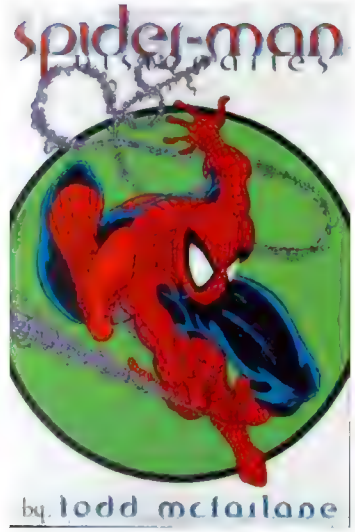
The central plot arc follows Ra's al Ghul's attempts to set the Gotham gangs against one another and control the distribution of a highly dangerous "immortality drug". The story builds to an early climax, then pauses for some excellent stand-alone character pieces, before the final chapter attempts to tie together what has gone before with the recent Ra's Al Ghul adventure in JLA. It's the only disappointment here, partly because the JLA references will be confusing to anyone not following that book, but also because there's a sense that the Batman/Ghul confrontation has been hurried - or even postponed - due to the clash of storylines.

The artists give excellent Gotham and Batman's latest costume change seems the most realistic yet, while visually similar to David Mazzuchelli's in **Year One**. Steve Mitchell's stylish inking brings welcome consistency to three pencillers. The limited palate colouring has readers divided, but certainly contributes to the grittier feel of stories that bring Batman down to street level, lessening the distance between the dark knight and the rest of his Gotham supporting cast. Shame Dave Johnson's stylish, original covers are reduced to half page reproductions, though.

The Verdict: Greg Rucka brings a realistic, Homicide-style approach to Gotham adventures. (RH)

Spider-Man: Visionaries - Todd McFarlane
Marvel Comics
By David Michelinie and Todd McFarlane.

Looking back on McFarlane's early Spider-Man work, it seems pretty rough and ready compared to the overwrought detailing that he'd become famous for. Yet in many ways this is some of McFarlane's best work, from before he started trying too hard, and it's impossible to deny that he created a look that was highly imitated throughout the 90s - from the redesigned webbing to the knees-touching-shoulders swinging style that became a stock pose. McFarlane brought fluid movement back to the character, and a welcome cartooning that suits these fun little stories well. Plus he nailed Peter and most of the supporting cast immediately, with only the overly glamorous Mary Jane looking out of



place - though the big hair is perhaps excusable in her role as late 80s fashion model.

But what of the stories? Well, Michelinie belongs to the old style "show AND tell" school of comic book writing, meaning a tendency to clog the art with unnecessary, often melodramatic exposition ("But within that city, another hero struggles with a foe he can NEVER escape"). The plots are light and fluffy, with only the introduction of Venom posing any real threat to Spidey, and a succession of rapidly moving subplots involving Peter's new job, marriage and book of Spidey photos. The writing comes most alive when dealing with Peter and MJ, just married and learning about balancing and sharing their lives as never before - hey, after 25 plus years, Peter finally has a sex life! There's a sense of fun here that McFarlane would lose entirely when he took on the character by himself.

The Verdict: Newer readers might wonder what all the fuss was about – guess you had to be there! (RH) BL

Click on Globe returns to contents

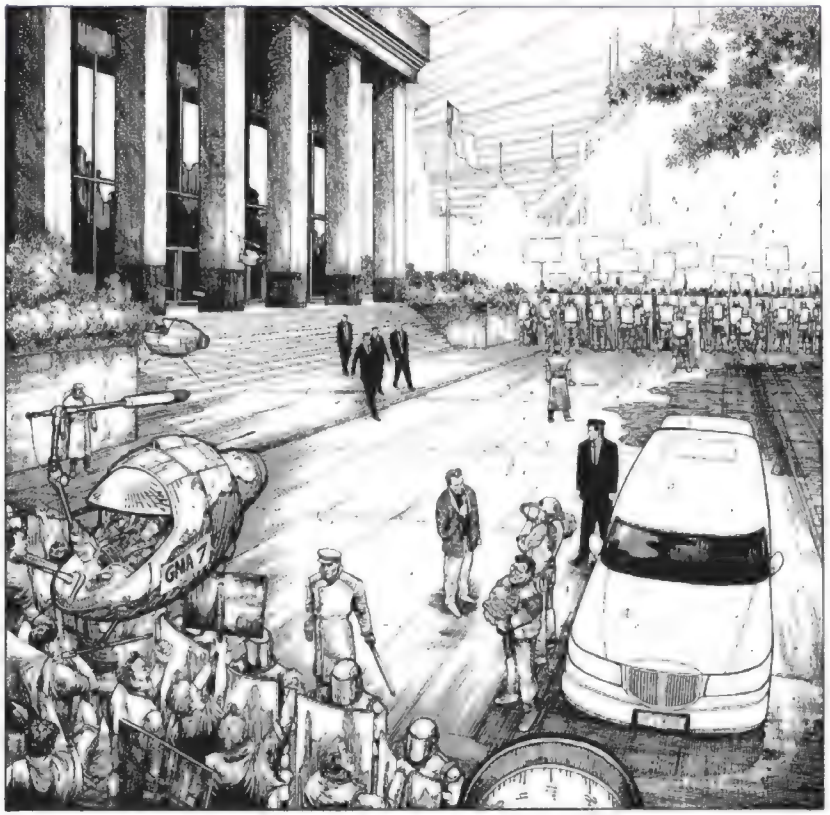
YOUNG GUNS

It's not age but talent that determines tomorrow's stars today, this month: **Gerry Alanguilan**

MY name probably won't ring any bells with most people, but I have been inking for Image and Marvel for the last seven years, on titles like **Wolverine**, **X-Men**, **Stone**, **Wetworks** and **Loner**.

Having pencilled and inked Philippine comics before becoming an inker in the US, I wanted to try pencilling again. After seven long years of just inking, I was concerned that I might have "lost" it, as it were. Drawing comics is not like riding a bike, where you don't forget what you have learned. In comics, you have to draw constantly so you can grow and improve as time goes on. If you don't do it, you lose it.

After inking the **X-Men 2001 Annual**, with Grant Morrison and Leinil Yu, I started drawing **Ochlocrat** for Conspiracy Comics, written by Doug Miers. Doug had approached me earlier with the prospect of pencilling and inking his newest project. Without asking what the story was and what the pay was, I said yes! That was probably because I had been impressed with Doug's earlier work on **Taxman** and **Operator 99**, and because I thought the title "Ochlocrat" was just so damned cool. I was also flattered that he approached me, an inker with no real pencilling credits to his name aside from a few random



images found on my website. I resolved to do my best not to disappoint him, and of course the readers.

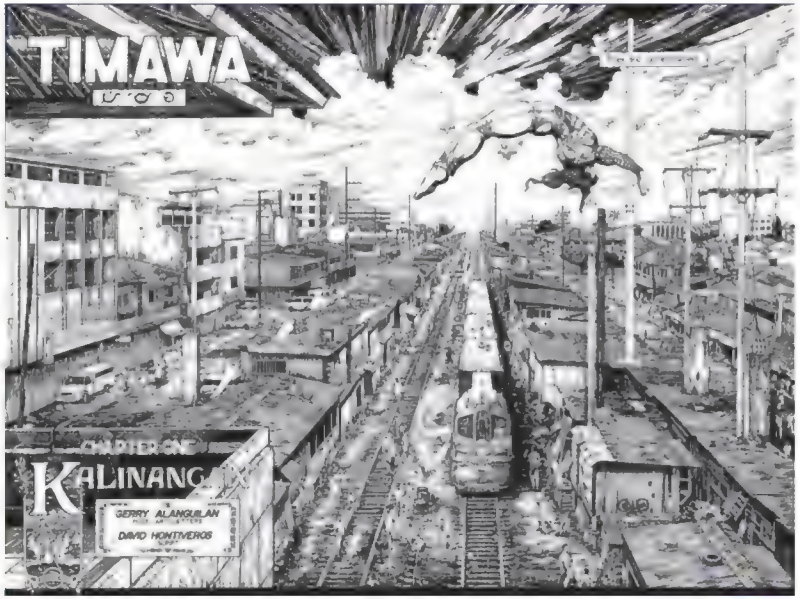
Upon facing my very first blank page, I literally froze, horrified upon realizing just what I had committed myself to. That first page nearly took a week to finish, the second page took only a little less than that. It became pretty evident to myself and to Doug that this could be a problem in the long run. Part of the reason why I moved so slowly was because I wanted to be careful. In those first weeks of drawing I wanted everything to be just right. I really had to struggle in the drawing because I had to

Click on Globe returns to contents

relearn a lot of the skills that had atrophied from neglect. I researched cars, buildings, planes, etc, just to get all the details right. Not only that, I had not let go of my various inking jobs that afforded me a living. I guess it became too much - I had to be hospitalized for several days in the middle of it all!

Slow as my progress was, I eventually finished it before Christmas. Difficult as it was, it was huge fun to do, specially because the main character was just so crazy and over the top. And so there it is. **Ochlocrat**, available in January 2002 from Comics Conspiracy. My years of not drawing have come to haunt me at many points in the book. I did my best, and here's hoping I can do better in the future.

Gerry Alanguilan
San Pablo City 2002



The Promise #9

BL

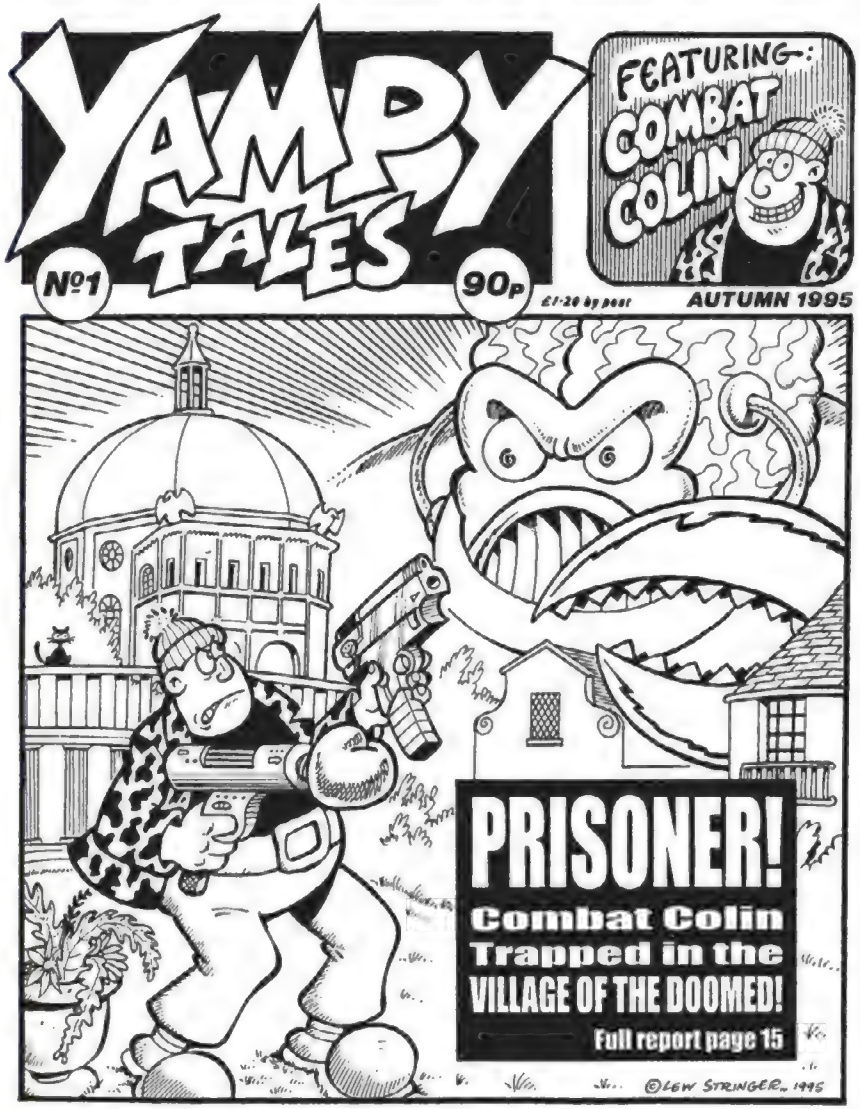
I DON'T REMEMBER HOW FAR YADNE AND I WALKED. ALL I REMEMBER WAS MY TOUNGE STICKING OUT, MY LEGS DEAD TIRED.
Hmm!
YOU DON'T DO MUCH WALKING, DO YOU?
YOU CALL THIS WALKING? I CALL IT A FREAKING DEATH MARCH!
WHINER. ANYWAY, WE'RE HERE.
AND AFTER ALL THAT, THERE WAS ONLY ONE THING I COULD SAY.
G.ALANGUILAN '01 e-mail: mnovelf@pworld.net

Click on Globe returns to contents

DRAWING BOARD

Secrets from the Artist's portfolio: ***Lew Stringer***

FIRST ISSUE! Not rude... Not crude... Just DAFT!



SKEGPOOL ATTACKED BY GUNGE MONSTER! ***See page 3***

WHEN I was a kid in the 1960s comics were everywhere, and by that I don't mean Jimmy Tarbuck and Leslie Crowther had formed street gangs on our council estate. I grew up reading comics such as **SMASH!** and **POW!** which featured traditional British humour strips alongside classic Marvel reprints, thus forming my belief that superheroes and slapstick are deserving of equal respect.

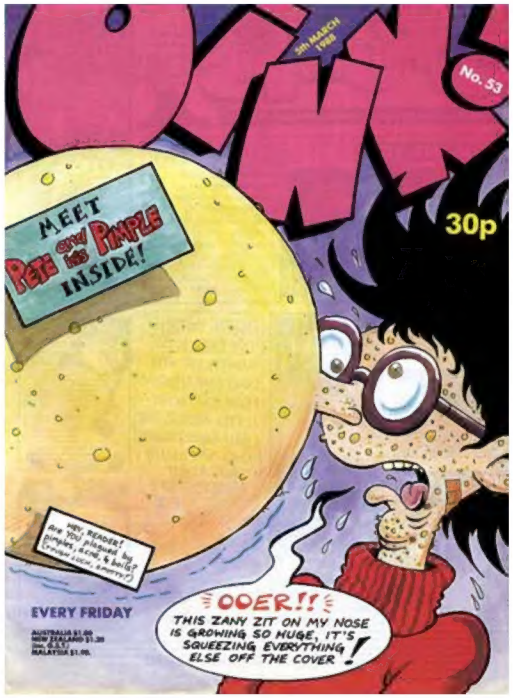
I self-published several fanzines and my Batman parody **Brickman** mini-comics in the late seventies/early eighties. Along the way, such megatalents as Dave Gibbons, Alan Moore, Kev O'Neill, and Mick McMahon gave me some good advice over many a pint and a pizza. They inspired me to submit work to publishers, and their much-appreciated wise words are still ringing in my ears today: "Send off some stuff, Lew. It's money for old rope".

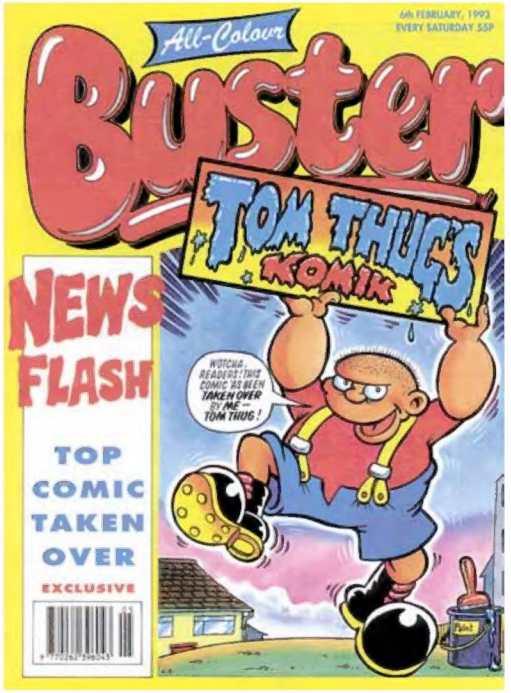
My first professional cartoon appeared in 1983 in Marvel UK's **The Daredevils** monthly. It only paid a fiver, but it was a start. It's surprising how fast work can pick up once one editor has faith in your abilities. A few months later, I was working as an art assistant to Mike Higgs in Birmingham, ruling out pages, filling in blacks, and "ghosting" Mike's style to illustrate a series of **Moonbird** children's educational books for the USA.

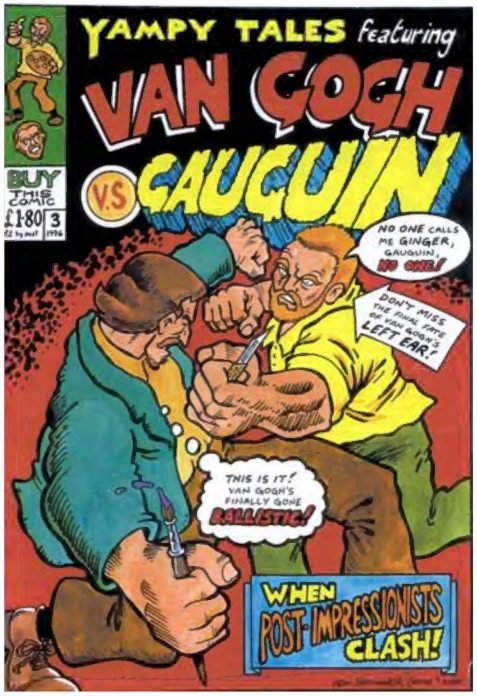
Working as an art assistant was the experience I needed to improve my style. I went freelance full time in 1984, and by the late eighties work was plentiful. 1986 saw the launch of **OINK!**, a more anarchic comic than the traditional weekly, for which I created *Tom Thug, The Brainless Bully*. Instead of being the usual affable "fun-chum" or another watered down *Dennis the Menace*, Tom was a character to laugh at rather than laugh with; a wannabe bully whose schemes backfired on him every week.

A more sympathetic **OINK!** character was *Pete and his Pimple*. Like Bruce Banner trying to rid

Click on Globe returns to contents


OINK!
No. 53
30p
MEET PETE AND HIS PIMPLE INSIDE!
EVERY FRIDAY
OOER!!
THIS ZANY ZIT ON MY NOSE IS GROWING SO HUGE, IT'S SQUEEZING EVERYTHING ELSE OFF THE COVER!



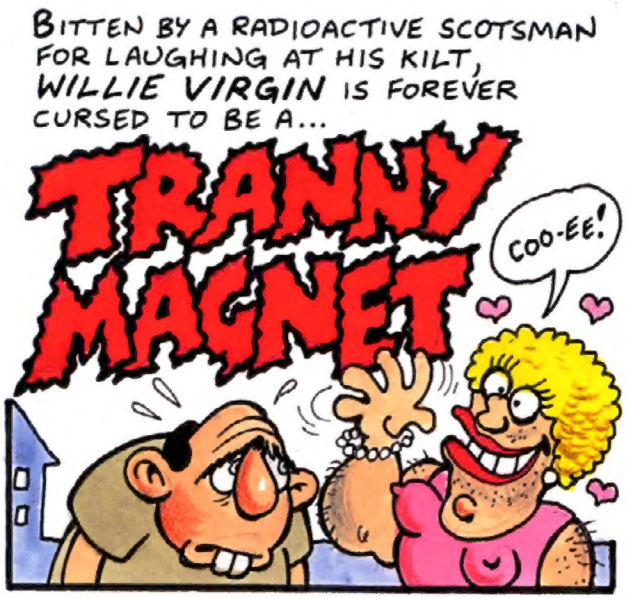


himself of the curse of The Hulk, Pete Throb's quest was to find a cure for the abnormally large pimple on the end of his nose. Tom and Pete both became very popular characters, and outlived the comic, moving over to **Buster** when **OINK!** folded in 1988. There, Tom's success continued, ousting *Buster* himself from the cover position on several occasions. New *Tom Thug* strips appeared until 1996, and thereafter reprints appeared until **Buster**'s final issue in 1999.

I always felt that comics in Britain should have more comedy-action strips like they do in Europe. In 1987 I had a chance to try to remedy this when I created *Combat Colin*, which appeared in Marvel UK's **Action Force** and later moved to **Transformers**. Although Colin was initially an urban commando type, his light-SF adventures took him to such diverse locations as other worlds and other times. At odds with traditional humour comics fare, I gave the strip continuity, and a wide supporting cast including Colin's sidekick Semi-Automatic Steve, their girlfriends the Giggly Sisters, and a horde of villains. Today, there is a fan website devoted to the characters at http://www.homeusers.prestel.co.uk/primus/combatcolin.htm

Customarily, British humour comics have featured light amusement rather than belly laughs. I've always aimed for the latter, and the reader response has always been positive. In recent years I've diversified my output by writing scripts for **Sonic The**

Click on Globe returns to contents

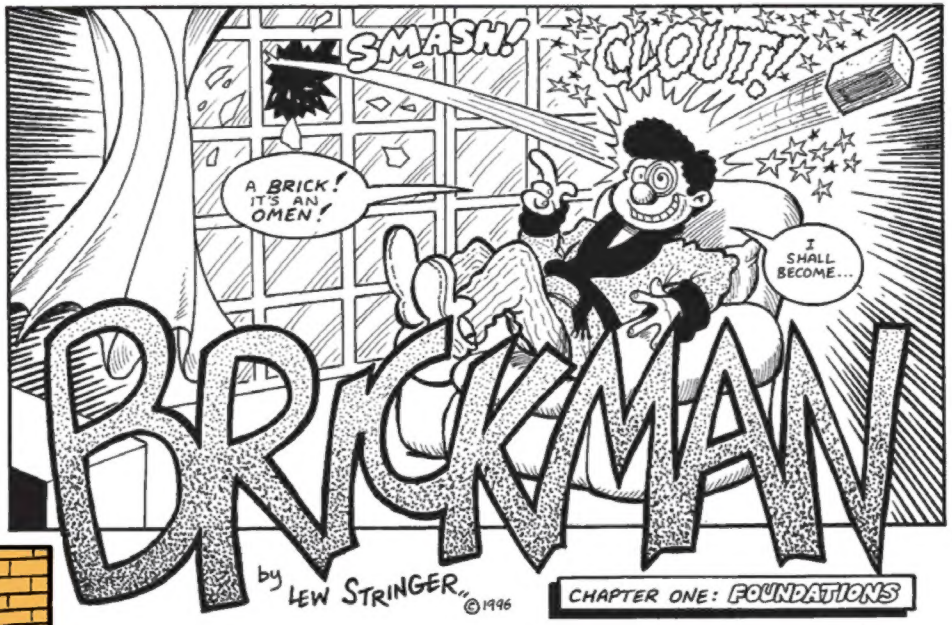


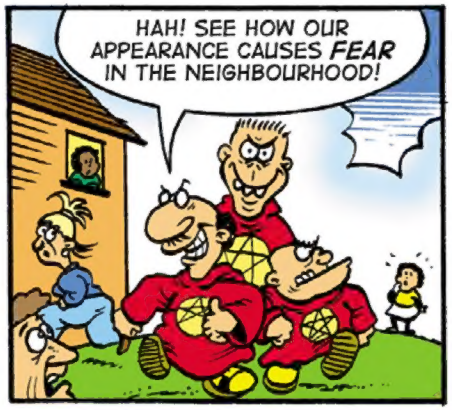
OUTTA ME WAY, WIMP! I'M IMPRESSIN' ME BIRD!
SHOVE!
HAVE A NICE DAY
FUMP!
ACTUALLY, I'M UNIMPRESSED BY PHYSICAL VIOLENCE!
DUHH... I AIN'T TOO KEEN ON IT MESELF NOW!

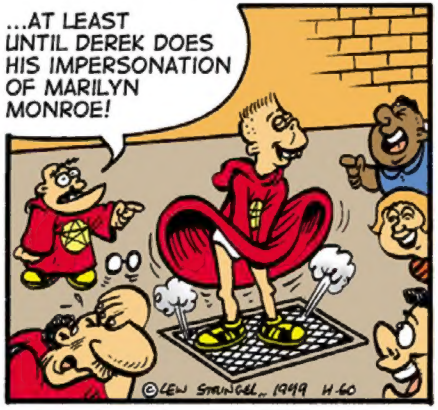
***Illustrations**: We'd love to give you a breakdown of Lew's selected artwork over these pages, but it's late, deadline is almost upon us and the bottom line is... Lew drew them all!*

Comic, **Lego Adventures**, and **CiTV Telly Tots** (for which I also created some CGI characters). My regular current work includes writing and drawing new strips for the adult comic **Viz**, such as the luckless *Tranny Magnet*. I'm also continuing with my *Suburban Satanists* strip, which I've been doing since 1997 for the Swedish comic **Herman Hedning**, as well as drawing occasional strips for the "Fun Size" editions of **Dandy** and **Beano**.

Lew Stringer BL







Click on Globe returns to contents

WORLD OF HEROS

Chris Spicer & Rebecca Bonser's made up comics news...

SHOCKWAVES have been felt around the comics world following the recent publication of the much-delayed **Danger Girl Sketchbook** after a Church Of England minister pointed out that its release coincided with two other strange events - the passing of a brightly burning comet and the birth of several two-headed goats!

Religious nutball Rev. Mark Knopfler (no relation) told us that his research had revealed further disturbing coincidences, including an earthquake following the announcement of J. Scott Campbell's move to Image, and, upon the publication of **Danger Girl #7**, a rain of fish over Ohio.

We spoke to Campbell, asking him if the publication of this title is a sign of an impending apocalypse. He said "Scream! My infernal master is coming to flay the skin from your body and drink the jelly from your eyeballs! Then you shall writhe in torment in the pit of fire and know the true pleasures of eternal agony!" He later changed his statement to "No comment."

A spokesman for the Vatican told us that the Pope himself had requested and read a complete run of the **Danger Girl** series in order to research and appreciate the religious and metaphysical subtexts in the comic. The spokesman went on to say "His Holiness likes Gabby best."

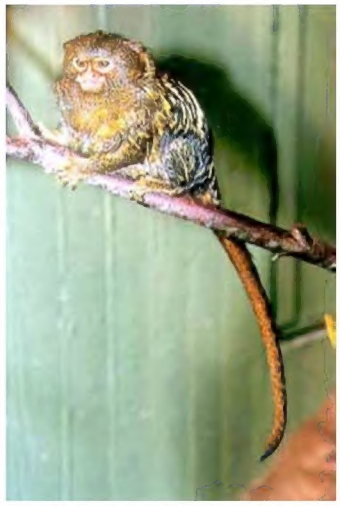
THIS OUT

SHITHOLE, Texas - A doctor is using the power of comics to educate local youngsters on how to maintain a healthy diet. Gastroenterologist Dr. Ronald Reagan (no relation) is launching a new title based around the workings of the human digestive system, but in a way that can be easily understood by children and the stupid.

Entitled **Digestion Farm**, the comic sets its stories on a fictional farmstead set in Tummy Land. Children reading the title will learn from Belly the Pig, laugh at the misadventures of the Bile Duck, and thrill as the characters go for rides on the Intestinal Tractor.

Digestion Farm follows in the tradition of educational titles previously released by the major publishers, such as Marvel's **The Punisher's Big Holiday Hepatitis Special**, and DC's **Superman: War On Gonorrhea**. Dr Reagan is hoping that children will respond more to the comic than to traditional forms of education. "Children do still read comics, don't they?" he asked us. "I don't get out of the house much these days."

We took to the streets of the doctor's home town to do a vox pop amongst its inhabitants, where the comic met with overwhelming approval amongst the town's population of ill-educated, inbred hillbillies.



TO FIGURE

CHRIS Claremont *(right)* has threatened to resign from writing Marvel Comics after the company announced their "Nuff Said" month.

The "Nuff Said" campaign crosses over all of Marvel's output for one month, and asks comics writers to meet an unusual challenge - all of the comics that month must ideally contain no dialogue. However, alleged writer Chris Claremont *(below)* has reacted with fury after Marvel rejected one of his scripts.

"We were perfectly happy with the comic's content," said a Marvel spokesperson. "The plot was fine, the pacing was fantastic, the action was incredible. The only problem was that Chris' dialogue-free script ran in at three hundred and forty seven pages. Of dialogue."

In a furious typed letter sent to Marvel, Claremont *(centre)* vented his anger at being rejected. "It's odd," said the Marvel spokesperson. "You'd have thought he'd be used to rejection by now."

In the letter, which itself ran to just under two hundred pages, Claremont *(below, left)* outlined his ire, and threatened to quit Marvel if his dialogue-heavy script was not reinstated. He went on to request a new tyre for his rope swing, and to be paid in bananas in the future.

How is Marvel going to get around this thorny problem? "We're just going to publish Chris' script," the Marvel spokesman told us. "And if some of the words should just happen to be lost in transit, it's not our fault, now is it..."

We asked Chris Claremont *(outside, right)* for a comment. He ranted silently for at least half-an-hour, and was still ranting when we decided to go for donuts.

COMIC INDUSTRY INSIDERS

BIGGER! Better! Balder! That's the line Marvel will be taking with their new Summer Slaphead Special! This extra-sized one-off tells what happens when the heroes of the Marvel Universe confront a terrible new menace – hair loss!

This tragedy will be caused by a terrifying new villain. In the months leading up to the special, this new menace will make his presence felt as some of the World's Mightiest Heroes find themselves assaulted by his heralds, Dandrufo, Recedon and The Itching Scalp. Finally, in the special itself, the real villain will appear - The Baldenator!

In a shocking turn of events, the entire Marvel superhero community will start shedding hair at an alarming rate, until eventually they all become bald! "You can imagine how this makes those guys - and gals - feel," spluttered Marvel's Head of Over-Excitable Press Release Writing, Bill Jemas. "It leaves them feeling weak, vulnerable, and open to attack - except for Professor X, who, already being bald, feels pretty damn good about the whole thing."

Can the Professor lead the slap-headed Superbaldies to victory against this new foe? Is the Marvel Universe doomed to a bleak future of shiny pates and thick woolly hats? Will Thor be able to cope without his luscious blonde locks? The only way to find out is to buy the **Marvel Universe Summer Slaphead Special**, released next April.

The **Marvel Universe Summer Slaphead Special** is sponsored by Laboratoire Garnier and Turtlewax.

Click on Globe returns to contents

HOLD THE BACK PAGE

No comments or letters, just a space to fill until next issue...

I'M GLAD to say that 2001 wasn't as tumultuous a year for **Borderline** as it was for the rest of the world. From 9-11 to 9 cents, there was something happening for most of last year. The year in comics for 2001 wouldn't be quite as boring as, say, 1997 was. And of course I'd like to think that this was one of the highlights!

2002 holds a lot of promise; the last time I remember the Western comic buying public being as excited about a forthcoming year was 1990 and history will state, quite clearly, that many people were very happy with 1991. For those of us with short memories, 1991 was smack in the middle of a world recession and the comics industry bucked the global trend. We're hearing about a new economic crisis on the horizon and comics once again are having a flirtatious relationship with the real world.

An important thing about 2002 is whether the US industry can continue its slow recovery. There is a growing feeling inside comics that some things changed since September 11. US comics might be going through its biggest change since the 1930s. This might be the end of a style of comics that generations have grown accustomed to.

You've just got through an issue of **Borderline** that gave over eight pages of coverage to a comic book that the majority of our US and UK readers may never have read. But we gave Chris Ware and **Jimmy Corrigan** a lot of space because it has just won an important literary award and we really need to blow our own trumpets a little more often!

We featured it because not only was the award important, but it may also prove to be have a certain ironic synchronicity about it. Ware's **Acme Novelty Library** isn't retelling the late Platinum Age of comics – the era just before the birth of Superman – but could he possibly be visualising the future of the existing US comics industry by using an identifiable allegory?

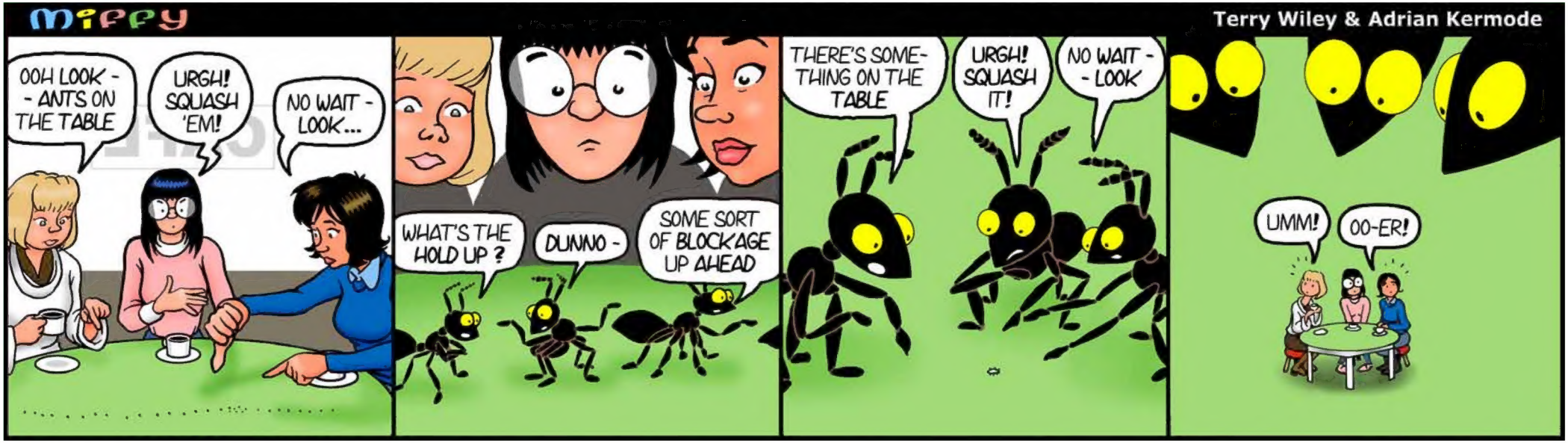
Marvel, DC and the rest of the spandex-oriented publishers need to find a way to breakdown the obstinacy of the US superhero fan, to find a way to make *other* comics accessible or approachable. But that's where problems start. Especially in the US, many fans treat anything not in spandex with almost blinding contempt. We're not talking about friendly rivalry here, or even a general bitchiness. We're talking full scale hatred between superhero fans and the rest of the world! In fact, it isn't even reciprocal, because the rest of the world tends to take the holier-than-thou attitude, while the superhero fan becomes animated, vehement and even aggressive. Perhaps we're just talking about two different groups of human beings that just happen to like a medium which is so diverse as to support very many widely varying factions?

So we're going to throw this one open for debate. Starting next issue we're having the first part of a fascinating discussion between Mike Kidson (*any* comics a speciality) and Jenni Cole (self-confessed superhero fan girl). It's difficult to guess what way our current readership will sway – 70% of you are currently US or UK based, but that percentage is changing every month. Heck, I'd be happy if there's even anyone remotely interested in it. However, I feel it's an important subject and this magazine is the perfect place to discuss it.

So, just why is there so much enmity emanating from superhero fans towards non-superhero product? Before we get into semantics, I do appreciate that this is a generalization, but it's not a sweeping one. There are many people who no longer read **Borderline** because we focus too much of our attention on the stuff they don't want to read or aren't remotely interested in. We know who they are and what they read. We know what we are, and that we actually have a very high percentage of content geared towards superheroes, but for some people if it isn't upwards of 99% they just aren't interested.

Now, these people might not be particularly vocal, but you, like me, know what's going on in your mind. Us Fifth Columnists who can appreciate comicbooks as a medium and be prepared to give the same amount of time and energy to Jimmy Corrigan's despair as to buxom wenches in spandex are a rare thing – seriously. We are outnumbered by Marvelites, DC crumblies and Image junkies. Except we're not. We're only in the minority in our own backyards. This is a global community; a global magazine. What we need to do is find out why superhero fans are so resistant to the global scope of the medium. After all, if there isn't a US comics industry in 10 years yet **Batman** is still being produced for the foreign market, perhaps they're going to want to know why.

BL



Click on Globe returns to contents